

JESUS' FISHING TECHNIQUES

Don't think that they won't work -- Simply do what He says.

Luke 5:1-11

TEXT: *One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

Aside from having an old-fashioned grocery store, a small dairy farm and later selling insurance, my grandfather used several acres of his small farm to grow and sell Christmas trees. My first job away from home was to spend several weeks over the summer trimming those trees so that they would grow with a nice uniform shape and be ready to cut and sell by Christmas. It was sometimes a hot and tedious work for a young boy. But every other day or so Gramps would come home early from the office and say, "Let's go fishing."

It was a great break from the hot work of trimming, even though fishing with Gramps often meant sitting in a boat catching nothing while he enjoyed smoking his pipe. Today, those are wonderful memories since I realized why he enjoyed fishing even though we caught few fish. It's the same reason I still enjoy hunting, even if I don't see a deer.

But relaxation was not the purpose for which Jesus' first disciples went fishing. It was their work, their livelihood, their business. Failure to catch fish meant a day without income to feed the family. So when after a night of failure a carpenter's son turned itinerant preacher stood on the shore and presumptuously advised these professionals about how to catch fish, the skepticism ran high.

Yet they would learn about JESUS' FISHING TECHNIQUES. Don't think they won't work; and, Simply do what He says.

What happened that day was no small thing. Who of you would do this? The Bible says that after this miraculous catch of fish, *...they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.* If Jesus were preaching today's sermon and announce that YOU are now selected to be His disciples who would, from now on, catch souls for Christ, would you leave everything, your jobs, businesses, homes and lifestyles to follow Him? These weren't the homeless and the unemployed. They weren't uneducated men like so many people often suggest. Jews were educated people, and these men had successful businesses. They owned a fleet of fishing boats and made their living on the sea. Yet, at Jesus' call, they set aside one profession for another.

Weren't they afraid to make this switch from fishermen to ministers? What would Peter say to his wife? "Dear wife, I've quit my job and have decided to follow Jesus. I've decided to be a missionary." The Bible doesn't tell us how she reacted to the news that her husband quit his job to be a preacher of the Gospel.

Yet Jesus assured them: *Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men.* Don't be afraid! Hadn't they just witnessed an amazing miracle? Contrary to Peter, the Expert Fisherman's advice: *Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets...* they encountered such catch, they couldn't handle it. Their nets began to tear and break under the weight, and they had to call for help: *they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.* So when Jesus told them that from now on He was going to have them catch men for the kingdom, they had no fear. They followed Him.

It's often called "The Great Commission." Before Jesus ascended to heaven, he left all of us this simple

command: *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.* Mt 28 We, too, are called and commanded to CATCH SOULS FOR CHRIST. Since Jesus Himself has called us, since he has *“All authority in heaven and on earth...”* and since He has promised: *surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age....* we do not have to be afraid of the Lord’s fishing techniques, that they won’t work.

The world is full of experts in every field. There are medical experts, legal experts, automotive experts, even hunting and fishing experts. If I’m really interested in success, would I not go to the appropriate expert for advice and counsel in regard to doing “mission work?” We often fall for the idea that in carrying out our Lord’s “Great Commission” we need experts to do this work. We feel that way because we think that it’s up to us to win souls. It’s our gracious privilege to use the tools Jesus has given us. They are the simple cross and empty tomb of Jesus and the water of Holy Baptism. Is this not what Jesus has clearly given us? He said to “make disciples” by *baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you...* Paul says the same thing when he writes: I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." Ro 1 So we are not ashamed of telling the same old story, preaching the same old Gospel. We are not ashamed of teaching our children the same old Bible History stories at school and Sunday School, over and over and over again. It is God Himself, with the power of His Holy Spirit who works faith and sustains it.

When we follow Jesus, we follow more than an expert. We follow the one who “knows where the fish are” as well as what to do to “catch them.” To enjoy the miracle of catching souls for the Lord, let us simply use Jesus’ fishing technique of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

The big temptation for us, however, is to look to human experts when trying to do the work of God’s Kingdom. Peter really didn’t think that Jesus knew anything about fishing. He was preacher and the son of a carpenter. Peter was correct. Jesus was NOT a fishing expert. Jesus is God. So when the miracle made him realize who Jesus is, he confessed his sin: *When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"*

Yes, Peter, you are a sinful man! And so are we! We too often fail to rely solely on the power of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. We also imagine that if we can lure people into our happy little fellowship, they will learn to like us and perhaps join our church. Is that mission work, just to get people to join OUR church? Or our Synod. If someone joins the WELS, does that mean the Church is growing? If we find ways to keep the youth entertained and busy in church things, will they love Jesus and keep away from drugs and sex? Lots of people think so. Move over, Peter, for we must kneel next to you with the same confession: *Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!*

Jesus DIDN’T go away from Peter. Instead, the loving and forgiving Savior commissions him to catch souls with the Gospel of forgiveness that just enlarged the heart of this tough old fisherman to the point that he quit his profession and became an Apostle. Yes, we also are sinful men, women and children, but Jesus hasn’t gone away from us as we deserve. He is still here with the power of His Word concerning what He did for all of us on the cross 2000 years ago. He’s still here with His body and blood in the Holy Communion He has given us, and He still pours out His Holy Spirit upon our babies in the water of Holy Baptism. And with these tools, these means of His grace, He has commissioned us to do what He says: Preach the Gospel, baptize and administer the Sacrament of the Altar until He comes again at the End of the World.

One problem we have is that our Savior isn’t standing on the shore telling us when to launch out into the deep water. He has ascended into the heavenly realms leaving us simply with the command to launch. He knows where “the fish” are. He knows who are God’s Elect. Peter said it that day on Pentecost when we declared: *Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your*

sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off-for all whom the Lord our God will call. Acts 2 Mission work isn't up to me. It is only a blessed privilege our Lord has invited me to participate in, and the joy is when Jesus chooses to put that fish on the end of my hook or in our net. What a joy it is when in the "nets" of our congregations are those who are our children and grandchildren, our neighbors and friends, and occasionally someone whom we've never met but are now a member of the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints and are actually worshipping with us in our congregation!

This isn't a difficult thing to do. It doesn't take experts to tell others what God has done for us in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Tell the story -- to family and friends, neighbors and to anyone who would ask you to give an answer about the hope that you have. Set the example! And as you regularly worship and give it top priority in your life, bringing your children with you, invite others also. And give regularly to the ministry of this Word.

Jesus knows where the fish are, and He has given us the tools to catch them for Christ. Let us use them with confidence, and we will be amazed at our God's fishing abilities. Amen.