

Luke 5:1-11. One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, ² he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. ³ 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. ⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." ⁵ 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." ⁶ When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. ⁷ 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. ⁸ When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" ⁹ For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰ 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." ¹¹ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Jesus gathers his church

1. He lowers his net over us
2. He casts his net through us

It's nice to be together again. After a number of days of being cooped up inside, cut off a bit from the outside world on at least one of those snowy blustery days, it's good to be gathered together in this group again. There is a welcome unity, as well as a togetherness that God gives to his church. Through Jesus Christ, we have a unity with our God, and we are also blessed with a unity with each other.

These are blessings that we may take for granted from time to time. But on a day like today, we come together with a heightened appreciation that we are gathered together in this congregation and in Christ's church. Made weary by life and some degree of isolation, we are refreshed in this unity that we share.

Through his gift of faith in Christ Jesus, we are included in his church as we are brought together into this family of believers. And as members of this family of believers, we also are included in his mission to bring more people into his church.

As so today, as we consider how Jesus gathers his church to himself, we notice how Jesus uses a familiar picture to illustrate how he gathers his church to himself: he uses the imagery of fishing. This morning, therefore, as we focus on

how **Jesus gathers his church**, we give thanks that **he lowers his net over us, and he casts his net through us.**

As we continue to follow Jesus in the early stages of his earthly ministry during this season of Epiphany, we now walk with him alongside the shore of the sea of Galilee. Known by a few names, this familiar body of water in the northern region of Galilee, was known also as the Lake of Gennesaret. This is a place where Jesus would spend a good portion of his ministry doing as he does here; preaching and teaching the Word of God. As he was preaching to this particular crowd, the crowd started to grow and press upon him. However, Jesus wanted to make sure that the powerful word of God was proclaimed for all to hear and so he adjusted to the needs of the moment, and the needs of the people. Luke describes the unique and serene scene this way as Jesus creates for himself makeshift pulpit from which to preach: ***² he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. ³ 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.***

In his desire to preach He met the people where they were quite literally. Jesus was aware of his surroundings and with some quick thinking he addressed the issue of the crowds pressing against him and made it so that people could hear him better. He wanted the people to hear the Word of God, and so in a rather gentle and unassuming way, He asked Peter to participate. I suppose Jesus could have simply taken the boat or found a different way to address the people, but instead recognize how he approaches Peter and he asks him for assistance. Jesus asks Simon Peter ***to put {his boat} out a little from shore.*** This is what Peter could do at the moment, this is how he could contribute. Peter is now gently pulled into the middle of this awesome scene. He is pulled in and part of this incredible ministry. He is there with Jesus. He is present and included in Jesus' activity of preaching of the gospel. The Son of God was teaching God's Word to a crowd of sinners and Simon Peter had a front row seat.

Close your eyes and picture in your mind how the Lord Jesus gathers this crowd to himself on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Open your eyes and see that the LORD still does this today. This is how our loving God operates. With the gentle call of the gospel, the almighty Lord calls unworthy sinners to listen to his Word. Jesus gathers crowds before him to sit at his feet and to hear the Word of God. And in his gentle way, Jesus even asks us to participate in his great mission to save and comfort, to give hope and peace to even more sinners. Who was Simon Peter, that God should include him in this great mission! Who was Isaiah, that God should call a man of unclean lips to be the mouthpiece of his Holy Word! Who are we that God should cover us with his grace, gather us to himself, call us to be members of his family, and participants in his gospel ministry! But this is what our

good and gracious God does! In his great love and his overflowing grace, he reaches out to sinners and his law exposes our unclean hands and hearts, lips and minds, and yet through the grace and mercy of Jesus we are forgiven, saved, and set apart as his very own. He lowers his net over us and brings us into his kingdom, into his family. Lost, condemned, and unwanted creatures no more, he gathers us to himself as his very own. Gathered in love, gathered and set apart for his good purpose, for our sin has been washed away, and through his gift of faith, we are saved. And not only are we saved but we are set apart to participate in the work of his kingdom of grace!

Consider the way that he asks Peter for the use of his boat so that he can preach to the people? What do we have that God can use to support his ministry? Ask yourself, *“Do I have gifts, do I have possession and offerings, do I have talents and abilities, that I can use as the body of Christ to support the work of the Gospel?”*

On Saturday I stood before a room of fellow believers, ordinary people both lay people and pastors who had been washed, cleansed, sanctified and set apart by the good news of Jesus. From 9:00am – 3:00pm, for nearly a whole day, we talked about different ways that we can support the work of the gospel in our churches and through the ministry of our schools and early childhood ministries. What an honor we have been given! What undeserved goodness that God has shown to us and an undeserved privilege he gives to us! Not only has he called us into his kingdom and gathered us into this crowd of believers who hears his Word and who are saved by his grace, but we also have the honor of supporting the gospel ministry as well. With our gifts and our prayers, with our efforts, with our time and intellect, with hearts, and hands, and voices we are able to serve as the body of Christ, carrying out this saving work. Consider how Jesus stood before Peter and asked him for the use of his boat so that he could preach the gospel.

When Jesus was done addressing the group from his boat pulpit on the shores of Galilee’s sea, Jesus had plans to give Peter a more personal and visually impressive object lesson out in its deeper water. ***When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.”*** Simon considered objecting but stopped himself short, ***“Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”*** Talking through his initial hesitation, Simon Peter confessed that he was weary from the frustrations of life and work, but he trusted Jesus’ word and so they went out according to Christ’s request. And that trust was quickly and abundantly rewarded, ***6 When they had done so, (when they had gone out to deep water and lowered their nets) they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break.*** The catch of fish was so large that Simon Peter had to enlist another boat of fisherman to come over and help them reel this in. ***7 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. ⁸ When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" With this remarkable sign of his power, Peter recognized Jesus as the almighty Lord. Peter also recognized himself as a man full of sin, in every which way, and yet the Lord Jesus came near with those beautiful and gentle words of gospel assurance, **"Don't be afraid."**

"Don't be afraid," he says to Simon Peter, and then Jesus adds grace upon grace as he calls Peter into this blessed partnership, **"from now on you will catch men."** Upon hearing this, Simon Peter, James, and John, **pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed [Jesus].** In a powerful and personal way, the LORD lowered the net of the gospel over these men, gathered them to himself, and he would prepare them to extend the gospel net even further, to share the Word of God with others as they would participate in the work of Christ's kingdom of grace. As Jesus spoke about the ministry of the gospel to Simon, he used a picture that Simon Peter knew and loved. *You will be fishers of men.*

Today we give thanks that in his great love for us the LORD has lowered his net over us and gathered to himself. Today we rejoice also in how the LORD Jesus includes us in his mission to bring the saving gospel to others. We are humbled and privileged to drop a line or two or three or more around us as with the power of God's Word we may help bring into God's kingdom our friends and family, and neighbors and coworkers. We humbly give thanks for being included in this great work of the Church through our local congregation, and as we pair up with local partners in the gospel through our early childhood ministry at Little Lambs. And what a privilege it is to lay our hands on the great net of global gospel ministry as we partner with fellow believers throughout the WELS to share the good news of Jesus Christ with people throughout the whole world. Do not fear, dear brothers and sisters, the Lord has gathered us together. Together he brings us near to himself and together he includes you and me in the mission of his Church. May the powerful Word continue to come to us and to go out through us! Thanks be to God! Amen.