

“A MIRACULOUS CATCH”

Luke 5:1-11

After a long, frustrating night of fishing—no nibbles, not one fish—the disciples of Jesus returned to the village of Capernaum, where they moored their boats and washed their nets. Along the shoreline, Jesus was teaching. So many people came to hear the word of God, pressing and crowding, that Jesus stepped into Peter’s boat and used it as a pulpit.

When finished teaching, Jesus told Peter: **“Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch,”** Luke 5:4. Consider the implications of this directive. It meant untying the boats recently tied. It meant using the nets recently washed. It meant leaving the safety of the shallows for the uncertainties of the deep. And most of all, it meant ignoring the reality that on their own, after an entire night of fishing, the disciples had caught nothing.

And remember, Peter and his fishing partners, his brother Andrew; his friends James and John, the sons of Zebedee; were professional fishermen. Their livelihoods depended on their ability to catch fish. So, they knew boats. They knew nets. They knew the best times and best places to fish. They knew the Sea of Galilee, or as Luke referred to it, the Lake of Gennesaret; the largest freshwater lake in Israel, measuring thirteen miles long, eight miles wide, and in some locations, one hundred and forty-one feet deep.

Yet, despite all the reasons for staying on shore, Peter said to Jesus: **“Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because You say so, I will let down the nets,”** Luke 5:5. And when the disciples did as Jesus instructed, what happened? A miraculous catch happened. In fact, the disciples caught so many fish, that their nets began to break and their boats began to sink.

However, this was not the only time Jesus used fish to teach these fishermen the same important lesson. Another miraculous catch occurred after the resurrection of Jesus; when the disciples had spent yet another fishless night on Lake Gennesaret and the next morning were returning to land. As they approached the shore, a Man called out, **“Friends, haven’t you any fish?”** They replied, **“No.”** So the Man said, **“Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.”**

According to John 21, when the disciples did as the Man asked, **“they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish,”** John 21:6. The net had to be towed to shore. With this miraculous catch came the swift recognition: “It is

the Lord.” The Man on shore was the risen Jesus, who, by the time the disciples reached land, had a hot breakfast prepared. A breakfast of fish, of course.

Then, a third miraculous catch involved Simon Peter alone. On one occasion, Peter was asked if Jesus paid the temple tax. “Yes, He does,” said Peter. As soon as Peter went inside the house, Jesus, who had not been a part of Peter’s conversation with the tax authorities, nevertheless told Peter to do this: **“Go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for My tax and yours,”** Matthew 17:27.

So, let’s see. A lake thirteen miles long and eight miles wide and in places one hundred and forty-one feet deep; and, according to the Israeli Department of Tourism, a lake covering an area of sixty-four square miles. A lake fed by the Jordan River to the north and flowing into the Dead Sea to the south. And in this massive lake Peter was to catch one specific fish? What were the odds of that happening?

Yet, witness the infinite power and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, who not only told Peter when to fish and where to fish; but told Peter that he would catch a fish—and that the first fish Peter caught would have a four-drachma coin in its mouth, the exact amount needed to pay a two-drachma tax for two people. Think about this Savior. Think about that coin and that fish. And then think about how foolish it is for any of us to worry that this Savior, Jesus Christ, cannot or will not provide for our daily needs. Think about the trust required for Peter to throw a line in the lake and wait for that first nibble.

All of these miraculous catches occurred at different times and at different locations on the Sea of Galilee. Yet, each miraculous catch taught the disciples the same truth; namely, that regardless of their own weaknesses and failings; regardless of how difficult or even strange the Lord’s directives might seem to them—like putting out into deep water after an entire night of catching nothing; or like casting a net on the right side of the boat; or like tossing a line into a massive lake to catch a specific fish with a specific coin in its mouth—when they followed the words of Jesus, they would always catch what He wanted them to catch, and the catch would always be miraculous.

Is Luke 5:1-11 only about a miraculous catch of fish on the Sea of Galilee two thousand years ago? Is it only about Peter and Andrew, James and John, who, after a long, frustrating night of fishing, trusted Jesus enough to set sail again and lower their nets? No. This text is as much about Lemmon, South Dakota as it was Capernaum, Israel. It’s about you, about me, about all of our hopeless or difficult situations in which we, figuratively speaking, have ‘fished all night’—using our own expertise and resources—and yet caught nothing.

This text is about trusting and obeying the written, inspired word of God; and on the basis of that word, having a willingness to leave the shallows, sail into the deep, lower the nets, and expect God to provide a miraculous catch; no, not of fish, but of blessings promised by God. This text is about expecting a miraculous catch from God for the simple reason that God in His infallible word has said that there will be one. **“But because You say so,”** said Peter. Or in the precious words of the psalmist: **“Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass,”** Psalm 37:5. Is this not the same as saying ‘put out into the deep, lower the nets, and waiting for God to provide a miraculous catch’?

And there are many other Bible verses which proclaim the certainty, power, wisdom, and miraculous blessings that come to us through the word of God. Psalm 33:6, **“By the word of the LORD were the heavens made.”** Psalm 119:105, **“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”** Isaiah 55:11, **“So is My word that goes out from My mouth: it will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”** Luke 11:28, **“Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.”** John 17:17. **“Your word is truth.”** Romans 1:16, **“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.”** 1 Peter 1:23, **“For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.”**

How many passages do we need? God blesses us, strengthens us, saves us, gives us a miraculous catch of blessings through His word. And if we understand that, we will also understand the importance of regularly hearing God’s word; of never ‘fishing for something’ in life apart from God’s word, whether searching for forgiveness or salvation, the right relationship or peace of heart and mind.

“But because You say so,” said Peter, **“I will let down the nets.”** I’ll commit. I’ll move forward despite past failings. I’ll push out into the deep—into the risk, into the ridicule, into the unknown. And when I lower the nets, I’ll expect a miraculous catch. Why? Because the Almighty has said that there will be one when I follow His word. Jesus did not say, “Let down the nets. Good luck. Let me know if you catch anything.” Jesus said, **“Let down the nets for a catch.”**

Is there any aspect of our Christian lives or daily problems to which these great truths do not apply? Ask Noah, who built an ark the length of four football fields on dry ground. Ask Moses, who raised an ordinary staff to part the Red Sea. Ask Abraham, who, though his body was reproductively dead and his wife Sarah was barren, still waited two decades for a promised son. Ask Joshua, who marched around the walls of Jericho seven times. Ask David, who faced a nine-foot-tall giant named Goliath. Ask

the Roman Centurion, who said to Jesus: **“Lord, don’t trouble Yourself, for I do not deserve You come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed.”** And when Jesus heard this, He was amazed and said to the crowd following Him: **“I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.”**

Each one of these individuals faced circumstances and impossibilities far beyond their personal means to resolve. But they pressed on. They set sail for the deep. They lowered the nets. Why? Because God told them too. And the resolution God brought about for each of them was nothing less than miraculous. A miraculous catch. Will the same God not bring about the same results for us when we trust in Him and follow His word? Yes. Of course He will.

How then does today’s text apply to *our* daily lives? Frankly, the more I considered this question, the more I felt like Peter and Andrew, James and John, trying to haul a netful of fish onto a boat; but in this instance, a net bursting with blessings and applications. I don’t have time to list them all. Nor am I certain I could list them all. But allow me to briefly address three: salvation, marriage, and ministry.

First, salvation. In some ways, I find the image of a long, tiresome, fishless night on the Sea of Galilee to be a fitting metaphor for Man as he is by nature: conceived and born in sin, lost and condemned, without God and without hope in the world. Always searching for answers. Always fishing for meaning, purpose, belonging, happiness, life after death, or even life before death, and never finding them.

Always lowering the net into the dark waters of human philosophies and worldly addictions, where dangerous Things swim below the surface; Things as likely to pull into the water and be pulled out of the water. Always looking for salvation through works, and because of works never being certain of salvation. “Did I do the right things? Did I do them perfectly, never failing once? Did I do enough to earn God’s forgiveness and gain heaven?” To borrow the words of Peter spoken in a different context: **“We’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything,”** Luke 5:5. This is the legacy of salvation by works.

Only, we didn’t catch God. He caught us—yes, a miraculous catch, through the power of God’s Spirit and God’s gospel. Surely, this is the meaning of the parable Jesus told in Matthew 13:37, saying: **“Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish.”** Isn’t this why Jesus called His disciples “fishers of men”? Isn’t this why Jesus told His disciples to **“go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation,”** Mark 16:15?

And because of God’s miraculous catch; how He brought each of us to faith in

Christ through the gospel, saving us, forgiving us, claiming us as His very own; blessing us in so many ways that even Paul struggled to describe them, simply stating in Ephesians 1:3, **“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ”**—that I can stand here today in this pulpit and declare to each of you, without reservation or condition, that all your sins have been forgiven. Why? Not because I say so, but because God said so. As Peter stated, **“But because You say so.”** As Paul wrote in Romans 8:1, **“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”** A miraculous catch indeed.

Second, marriage. Early in my ministry, I walked into church one Sunday and saw George sitting alone in a pew. My first thought was, “What’s wrong with George?” My second thought was, “Where’s Anna?” I had never seen George in church without his wife Anna. George looked more melted into the pew than supported by it. His head was bowed; his shoulders, slumped; his chin, stubbled; his hands, fidgeting. This was not the George I knew; the elderly man with Howitzer blue eyes, a quick mind, and a sharp tongue. This George looked utterly defeated. Leaning forward, I asked, “George, are you okay?” “No,” he said, “I’m not okay.” A pause, deep breath, then resignedly: “I’ve got woman troubles.”

Folks, nothing could have prepared me for his answer. Where was that course in the seminary—Geriatric Marital Counseling 101? I was stunned. I don’t recall what I said in response. But nearly forty years later, I recall exactly what I was thinking: “Woman trouble? George, you must be joking. You’re eighty-five years old. You and Anna just celebrated your fiftieth wedding anniversary. I know. I was there. I had two pieces of cake. You can’t be having woman troubles. Elderly couples, especially elderly *Christian* couples, never have marital troubles. That’s a fact. Look it up. Instead, they walk hand-in-hand down rose-scented promenades. They sit side-by-side in matching Lazy Boy recliners, feet up, shades down, munching homemade cookies, and watching Lawrence Welk and his Champagne Music Makers.

Yes, I was wrong. Christian couples, including *elderly* Christian couples, can and do experience marital difficulties. And if that isn’t said loud or often enough, it’s not because Christians don’t believe it. It’s because Christians are reluctant to admit it. But Christians also have something, Someone, that the world does not: Jesus Christ and the power of His word. As difficult as circumstances may be, no matter how grievous the wounds or heartbreaking the loss or deep the rejection or ‘barnacled the hull,’ if a Christian husband and a Christian wife come to the Lord and say, “Lord, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything; but because You say so, we together will push out into the deep and let down our net for a catch”—what will happen? What has

to happen? A miraculous catch.

The key word here is MIRACULOUS. If God is working the miracle, what we think we can or can't do is irrelevant. Follow God's word, there will be a miraculous catch. Commit, trust, expect. Put out into the deep, lower the net, and expect God to fill it with marital blessings. He will. I wouldn't say this if I didn't believe it. I believe it because God says it. I believe it because today's text, taken from the word of God, teaches it. Do you believe it?

Third and finally, ministry. And this is the one application made by the text itself; or more precisely, the application that Jesus made through that miraculous catch of fish. The timing of this miracle was not a coincidence. The disciples had just returned from that long, frustrating night of fishing—no nibbles, not one fish. On their own, despite all their knowledge, skills, experience, boats, nets, and secret fishing holes, Peter and Andrew, James and John, had caught nothing.

Yet, by following the word of Jesus, the disciples caught more fish than they could count or carry. I say *they* caught; though in the truest sense, the disciples didn't catch the fish. The nets didn't catch the fish. The word and power of God caught the fish. And that which the disciples experienced as fishermen would guide their ministries as fishers-of-men.

“Don't be afraid,” said Jesus, **“from now on you will catch men.”** It's because the word of God—not me, not you, not Peter or Andrew, James or John—that we so gladly and gratefully preach the gospel at St. Luke's in Lemmon, SD; that we put out into the deep, lower the net, and wait for God to provide the miraculous catch.