

Pressed In To Hear The Word

Luke 5:1-11

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Can you imagine the scene? *On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on Him (Jesus) to hear the word of God, He was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, and He saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, He asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the people from the boat.*

Furthermore, in reviewing the end of chapter four in Luke's Gospel, the one preceding our text, we're told that Jesus was trying to depart to a desolate place. He was trying to get away and be alone for a time. But the people sought Him out. They did not want to let Him leave.

Do you understand what happened? These people were so hungry to hear the Word of God that they followed Him and were pressing in on Him to hear that Word. It wasn't even a worship service in the temple or synagogue. These people were crowding and pressing about Him to hear the Word in a setting outside the regular gathering of God's people for worship service.

Jesus, try though He might to escape for a little rest and recuperation, could not escape these people who wanted to hear Jesus "preach the Good News of the kingdom of God." (Lk 4:43) These people were hungry for what Jesus had to proclaim to them. They couldn't get their fill of God's Word for them.

I wonder, what would happen if I were to walk into the meeting room at Zion after the service some Sunday morning and, while everyone is enjoying a donut and a cup of coffee said, "OK, here are some Bibles, now we're going to take a half hour and study the Bible." I would guess that a large percentage would get up, finish their coffee, and there'd be a mass exodus. That's what has happened at every church I ever attended that had donuts and then Bible Study.

There are six Bible studies available each week, but only a few attend. What a shame that God's Word, and the study of it is so little appreciated in our midst.

I will say though, that every Bible Study I teach has, at some point, gone over the expected allotted time frame. Nobody has ever complained, at least not to me. From all appearances in fact, those present were more than glad to sit and continue the discussion. From the comments given to me, those attending are glad to be there. They are pressing about to hear the Word of God. There is a hunger that is evident.

Isn't it interesting that at other times when God's Word comes to us, there is a different attitude? And not only here at Zion or St. Peter or St. John. I have also learned in my discussions with other pastors, that there are always some people who will make it known how they feel. They won't say it exactly this way, but they will complain that the "preaching of the kingdom of God" goes on too long. They have definite opinions that sermons should be shorter and the service better not run longer than an hour.

It is as if one hour a week is all people of today can afford to give up to be in God's house and hear His Word. Is this the attitude of people pressing about to hear the Word of God? Or, is it more the attitude of people coming simply to do their Christian duty, get it out of the way, and get on with what they consider the "more important" things that take up the week?

I am not saying that sermons have to go a certain length of time, nor that services should last over an hour. But, isn't it interesting to compare the contemporary attitude to the different attitude of the crowds in our text? They were pressing in on Him to hear the Word. Today, people look at their watches, expectantly waiting for the time to bolt out the door.

Of course, sometimes the crowd pressing about Jesus was trying to kill Him. What He preached was always the truth of God's Word. However, all too often, it offended some of those listening. Imagine that, God's Word is offensive!

So, we find Jesus in our text, the people pressed about him so closely that He is unable to be heard beyond those closest to Him. So what does He do? He improvises a podium. Have you ever heard sound carry over a lake? It is a natural PA system. So, Jesus does exactly that. He gets into a boat and goes away from the shore and teaches so that all can hear.

When He's finished, while still out on the water, Jesus tells Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." What a request. They had fished all night. There were no fish. They were tired. The water was deep, dark, unknown, and forbidding. Yet, Peter did as Jesus instructed.

My friends, God's Word worked in Simon Peter's heart. And when Jesus asked him to do something, his response was immediate obedience. Not matter how futile the suggestion seemed, Simon did as His Lord instructed.

Doing as His Lord instructed, Christ showed forth His divine mercy and grace. God's grace and will moved Simon to act. God's mercy and grace caused the nets to be filled. Peter fell to his knees repentant at the sight of God's marvelous grace, power, and might. He begged Jesus, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

Jesus forgave his sin, saying, "Do not be afraid." In short order, He had informed Simon, "You see this great catch of fish, what you thought *impossible*? This God can accomplish. So also, your sins. Though they are scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Do not be afraid, they are all forgiven."

Forgiven, Jesus speaks a further Word to Simon Peter, "from now on you will be catching men." It is as if Jesus were saying, "Simon, you have seen the great work of God. You cast a net into the dark deep, into the unknown and forbidding, where nothing had been before, and God supplied the catch of fish. Come, follow me, and bring Good News of God's kingdom to people. You need not fear the daunting task of taking God's Word into that dark, deep, unknown, God will fill the net, His Word will produce the catch."

Without so much as a backward glance, Simon and his two partners, James and John, left everything and followed Jesus. God's Word produced action in these men as well.

Dearly beloved, today you have been brought into God's house. You have heard His Word about His kingdom. And today, you will leave this place also being sent out to bring that same Word to others. You are to cast out the net of God's Word into the deep, dark, unknown of our world and culture. God is present in that Word and will cause the increase.

Ever notice how churches look like big inverted boats? Look up! Imagine this building turned upside down! It is a boat! You are here today because someone cast the net of God's Word - it caught you and brought you into the boat with Jesus.

Dear friends, the Word of Christ is an amazing thing. It causes incredible things to happen. It catches sinful men and women and brings them into the presence of Christ, and it forgives them of their sins. And then, it sends them back out into the world.

It is a fearful thing to go out into the deep, dark, unknown of our world. This Independence Day weekend we remember that freedom isn't easy. Christianity, here in the land of the free, is spoken ill of at every turn. It is a land where we may work hard for a catch and see no benefit. We may fish through the night and catch nothing. We may become depressed and despondent about how quickly the boat *is not* filling up. We may be tempted to try all sorts of tricks to fill the church more quickly.

Dearly beloved friends, that Word of God set in motion in our text today is still at work. You are here, aren't you? You are here in this boat, the holy ark of Christendom, with Jesus. Christ is present today, for He is where His Word is. You confess your unworthiness to be in His presence, calling yourself a miserable sinner, and Christ says to you, "Do not be afraid! Your sins are forgiven."

We need to remember who it is who is doing the work. God! We are simply to let down the nets of God's Word and He will fill it as He sees fit.

In today's lesson, Simon heard God's Word and was forgiven. This is exactly what equipped him to be a fisher of men. Today, you too have heard the same Word, you have been forgiven for the secondary place God's Word has been in your life, and your reluctance to proclaim it to others. You have been equipped by God to be fishers of men by the forgiveness of your sin.

The multitudes that day, pressed around Jesus to hear the Word of God. Christ got into the boat and preached the Gospel to them. He threw out the net of His Word, and through that Word, many were made a part of the Kingdom of God.

Today, you are pressing about Christ to hear His Word. OK, not exactly pressing - being good Lutherans the pressing is to see who can arrive in time to get the back pews. But, you are pressed about to hear His Word forgive you all your sins.

You are pressed about Christ to hear the Word of God speak to you the marvelous message of His grace.

You press about Christ to hear the Word of God, to touch, taste and eat of His body and drink of His blood. You know that it is in that Word you receive forgiveness and the grace to serve Him with a God-pleasing life.

Christ, in His boat, through His minister, has proclaimed the Gospel to you. The net was cast out and you were brought in to be pressed about Christ. He came to you today with His Word. You have been forgiven and made anew as a part of His kingdom. God out, and do not be afraid. Amen.