

Sermon Third Sunday after the Epiphany 2018

January 21, 2018

Mark 1:14-20

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel lesson previously read.

When we hear about the disciples being called from their vocations of fishermen to be fishers of men, I think it's good for us to remember just how fishing works. I say this because we might have some image related to our own experiences with a line and hooks, with bait and rods, but as I am sure is obvious, that's not how the disciples fished. Mark reminds us that these men fished with nets. In fact, a description I read explained that the net specified by Mark here would be one, which was a circle with weights around the edges. The fisherman would then throw the net into the water, where it would trap fish and sea life into it as it fell. When it finally reached the bottom, the fisherman, would pull the rope closing it and drawing back into the boat. In short, while there was an aspect of knowing where to cast the net, it was not the fishermen who actually put the fish into the net.

I point that out, because we should see what our Lord is doing here by calling the disciples to become fishers of men. He's saying that He will send them out to draw men to the church. But as they do that it will be similar to how fishing itself works. What do I mean? Well, to start, there would be a net. What would that net be? It would be the Word, it would be that Gospel that Jesus Himself preached. Now we'll touch on this a bit more in a second, but as we think about that as the net, we see that this word is cast around and it draws the fish into it, who are carried into the boat. Now as I say that, there are two things to think about there. First of all, just like the disciples didn't put fish into the net, they also wouldn't be putting people into the net of the Word. Secondly, when the net draws the fish unto the boat, what should we understand the boat to be? Do you know? We say it symbolizes the church, in fact, if you're familiar with church architecture, you might know that this part of the sanctuary outside of the front, the part outside of what we call the chancel, that part is called the "nave." And do you know what the word nave comes from? It comes from the Latin word, "navalis," which means ship, or something nautical, or naval. You see if you look at the shape in here, it's like an upside-down boat. You're in the nave, the boat of the Church. So, our Lord calls the disciples to cast the net of His Gospel into the world, and through that to bring those drawn into the net into the boat of His Church.

As we understand this, then, we have to understand that He calls us to that as well. They were the Church then, we are the Church now, and through us, through the Church, the Lord proclaims the Gospel to draw His people into the boat of His salvation.

Now, as I said that we'd come back to the Gospel, I think we can draw something from this passage here about that Gospel. Look at what Mark says about Jesus preaching. He tells us that Jesus came to Galilee "**proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.'**" Here this gives us something to look at when considering this Gospel that we have, the Gospel that Jesus preached. The preaching of the Gospel meant that Jesus was telling the people that the time was fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God was at hand.

So to ask the Lutheran Question, "What does this mean?" In fact, what did it even mean then? I don't think we can grasp just the amount of weight these words carry. "**The time is fulfilled.**" The time has come! It's done! But the time for what? For all that God has revealed in His Word. For the very promises of Scripture to come a head. All of it. The whole of the Old Testament, being fulfilled here in Jesus. The very words of the Lord bringing about His Messiah, bringing the salvation of the world. It's time! It's happening, now!

And the Kingdom of God coming is right along those same lines. I think I've mentioned this before, but the Kingdom of God coming means that sin itself will be overcome. It's a reminder that we live under the burden of the dominion of sin, death, and the devil. A reminder that when God created the world, He created it toward the purpose of life, fellowship with Him, and that we would actually reign here on earth, not in power and majesty, but under the gracious provision of our God. It's a reminder that the fact that we suffer comes because of sin, that suffering is the manifestation of death, and that when we sinned we handed off our dominion to the devil, whose reign here is one of tyranny and misery. Jesus' preaching, then is a reminder that God's Kingdom is entering into this world overcoming that brokenness and sinfulness which oppress everything and everyone. And as that Kingdom comes, it brings with it light and forgiveness, and where there is forgiveness, as Luther says, there is life and salvation. With that coming then, Jesus tells us that we need to repent and believe.

We need to repent, not to save ourselves, but because that repentance prepares us for the coming Kingdom, prepares us for recognizing ourselves as slaves under the tyranny of sin, death, and the devil. And it prepares us to rejoice in the One who comes bringing that Kingdom, bringing His cross and forgiveness in His life, His crucifixion, death and resurrection.

OK, so as I say all of that, it sounds good doesn't it? In fact, as I was reflecting on this, I was reflecting also on something I had read recently. Now those of you who follow the NFL at all, know the New England Patriots and their success over the last fifteen to twenty years. You may also have seen that there was an article recently put out by ESPN about the reported tension between the owner of the Patriots, their coach, and their quarterback. Well, I read this article and was struck by something. It mentioned the intense competitiveness of their quarterback, Tom Brady. It mentioned how to him, there is an unquenchable drive to succeed at football. Apart from his family, it sounds like the only thing that matters is football, football, and football. In fact, he has won five Super Bowls, and yet this is still unquenchable. Now, I don't know for certain that Tom Brady isn't a Christian, so I don't mean this in a self-righteous fashion, but it appears that this drive is such that he is looking for something that will be satisfying. He is looking for this good that Jesus speaks about in relation to His Kingdom: the good of the fulfillment of time, the good of the Kingdom of Heaven being at hand.

You see as we see ourselves in the world we have to understand that this is what we have in Jesus. We have the joy and satisfaction of this Kingdom. We have the joy of knowing that when we are unsatisfied in this world it's a reflection of our conscience pointing out the fact that something isn't right. We have the joy of knowing that this discomfort in our existence is the pang of the Law telling us, "You have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God," and we have the joy all the more of knowing, "you have been justified by God's grace through the redemption, the forgiveness, that is in Christ Jesus." This is our joy as Christians, as the Church. The joy of the net of the Gospel that has drawn us into the Church and that we have to cast before the world to draw them to us.

And you all know this joy. That's why you're here. You know the joy of that Kingdom of God coming to you, prepared by the repentance, which reveals the offense of your sin, received by the faith that was given to you in baptism, that is increased in the Word, that is nourished in Jesus' body and blood. You know this, and that's why you come again and again and again, you know that you need this medicine constantly in the midst of the dissatisfaction of the empty things in this world. St. Augustine said it so well in his *Confessions*, "*you made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you.*"

But as you all know this, I am sure that as you hear this call of the Church to proclaim the Gospel, two things happen. First, you hear this, and you're reminded of your call as a part of the Church to confess your faith to the world. And second, you don't understand why people would hear and not believe. In fact, as those two things

happen, I wouldn't be surprised if something else happens too: you feel guilty because you feel like you don't do your part in this. You feel guilty because you feel like you don't confess your faith enough as you should, or you feel like you don't confess it as well as you should, and so you feel like it's your fault when people aren't drawn into the Church. If only YOU would do more to bring people in! If only people like YOU ALL would do more to bring people into the Church, then maybe the Church in this country wouldn't be in such decline! Isn't that how you feel when you hear this call of Jesus to be fishers of men?

Well, I can say to you on the one hand that you should feel guilty. You shouldn't feel guilty because you haven't grown the Church enough, but you should feel guilty because whenever the Law confronts you, you should acknowledge that you have fallen short. I mean, whenever you hear that God has commanded something you should know that you haven't done enough, and you can only trust in the mercy that is in Jesus. That's always the case. But like I said, you shouldn't feel guilty that you haven't grown the Church enough. If you remember, I said in the beginning, that fishing for men was like fishing for fish: the fisherman cast their nets into the water and that was their job, they couldn't make the fish go in there.

Your job, our job as the Church is to cast the net. It's up to the Holy Spirit to fill it. This means that you don't have to worry that you don't say things well enough, that if you were more articulate than someone might believe. In fact, as you consider how we don't understand why people don't believe, it's a reminder that even we wouldn't believe if it wasn't for the Holy Spirit. It's a reminder that you didn't choose Jesus, you didn't even accept Him, He chose and accepted you. It's all His doing. We are all so sinful we can't do anything toward faith. So, when someone doesn't believe it's not because you didn't explain it well enough. It's just the fact that this is hard, impossible without God's work.

But as we celebrate Epiphany we see that as Jesus, God in the flesh, calls the disciples to cast the net of the Gospel into the world, and that through that draw people into the boat of the Church, He is the One who is still the Lord of the Church. He is the One who ultimately puts the fish into the net. As you hear this then, know that you need to be out there confessing your faith, inviting people to hear the word, but you need to know that God will take care of it when you fall short, He will make up for your insufficiencies. And know that He has already atoned for you when you have not confessed as you should. This is His mercy in Jesus, His Kingdom which has come to us fishers of men. Amen.