

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

It was on the third day that God commanded the waters under the heavens to be gathered together into one place, and the dry land appeared. It was on the fifth day that God created the living creatures of the waters, great sea creatures and every living things that moves which with the water abounded. Now the same God that spoke the seas and all that fills them into being gives to mere men a glimpse of His power.

Standing by the shore of the Lake of Gennesaret, he saw two boats on the shore. Both were empty, and the fishermen were washing their nets after a long night fishing. He entered Simon Peter's boat, and directed him to put out a little from the shore. There was a multitude around Him, St. Luke records. And from the boat the Lord taught them.

That is certainly the greatest miracle of St. Luke's account. The God who created the heavens and the earth took on Flesh. And He deigned to teach fallen men, that they might come to know Him aright. And for you, that you be save, that you live, His Words are preserved in the Scriptures. You have heard His Word read this day.

His Words are not like our words. His Words are powerful, creative, life-giving. By them He exposes ungodliness. By them He opens heaven. He speaks and it is. In mercy, in love, that fallen men come to believe that His Word is the Word by which all things were created, that men not doubt, that you not doubt, He worked a miraculous sign. In His State of Humiliation He exercised for a moment His authority over the creation. The purpose of the sign was to reinforce His Words with a powerful event, an event seen and witnessed by men, a work and a wonder impossible for men to do.

So the empty nets were filled, filled to the point of breaking. With both boats assisting, the weight of the catch was sufficient that they began to sink. It was unprecedented, there had never been a catch like it. And this after the men had done their best all night to no avail. St. Luke records that Peter, James, John, and all that were with them were astonished. But the miracle wasn't about boats or nets or fish. As incredible as it was, boats rot, nets break, and fish die. And so do men.

"Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing..." That's Peter's confession. And it is in perfect accord with the curse that all men bear in their flesh: "Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of our life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you... In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return."

So men toil and labor, but they can never pull themselves out of the depths of the dark sea of their sin and transgression. And toiling for a lifetime, dust is their reward. Like every sinner, before God your works avail naught, your nets are empty. As the Prophet Jeremiah writes "Let him sit alone and keep silent, because God has laid it on him; let him put his mouth in the dust..."

So the same Peter that witnessed the miracles of Jesus writes “He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil... the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

It must have been humiliating to professional fisherman to work hard all night, and then to have to do all the more work of cleaning and storing their empty nets. But the empty nets are a sign, a sign of man’s impotence, a sign of man’s fallenness. They were dirty, empty, and deteriorating, nagging reminders of fallen man’s powerlessness. The empty nets were a little taste of death.

Perhaps you have felt that emptiness. Perhaps you have known disappointment, adversity, defeat, loss, and that sure feeling that, as Luther puts it, “...left to myself I would quickly bring it all to ruin.”

But in mercy, in a miraculous demonstration of His power and authority, the Lord filled those empty nets. First He taught, that men might hear and believe. Then He brought forth a catch unlike any men had ever seen. But the men, having brought that miraculous catch to the shore, did not revel in their success. They knew the success wasn’t theirs.

They didn’t immediately begin boasting. They didn’t sell the fish and become rich. They didn’t become high-priced fishing consultants. They left everything. They left boats and nets and families and homes. They left everything and followed Jesus. Because that’s what faith does. Faith realizes that it is God who works all in all.

While men’s best efforts, like the dirty nets of Peter, James and John, are empty and perishing before God. there is a work that avails much before God. Christ’s Work. His miraculous conception, His sinless, perfect birth, His holy life, and His atoning suffering and death were accepted by God the Father as the Once For All Sacrifice, the Work by which your sins are forgiven.

And in His defeat of death, sin and death are forever conquered, and you are declared to be holy and righteous before God. In Him God counts your works as pleasing and good. In Him God counts your nets as full. The Lord of Light, the Bright Morning Star, did His miracle not in the night but in the day. The darkness of night is defeated by His victory over the darkness of Calvary. And to those bewildered fishermen, He would give them a better Net, a better Boat, better water, and a better catch.

He gave them the Net of the Gospel, which is cast into the deep dark waters of sin and death, and brings forth a living catch - not like fish pulled from life to death, but rather men pulled from death into life. You see, dear Christian, you are the miraculous catch. The Lord catches you by the Apostolic Word and Ministry in the Sea of the Font.

He does it through that life-giving Water, Water comprehended with His Command and Promise. You are the living catch, pulled by the Miraculous Net from death to life. Through the Lord’s mercies you are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning. Great is His faithfulness.

He pulls you out of darkness and into a better boat, the Holy Ark of Christendom, the Nave of the Church. And here you enjoy peace, safety, consolation and restoration as you wait in faith for your Lord's return. You enjoy the protection of the Ark of the Church from the assaults of the world outside, as you are preserved by the Net of the Gospel, which will never be broken, and in the Holy Church which will never sink, nor will the very gates of hell prevail against Her.

In faith those men left their livelihood and their sustenance behind, and followed the Lord. It is He who truly gives life, He who truly sustains, He who truly feeds. To you this day He gives His Body and His Blood, that you believe, eat and drink Christ. He shows you His compassion according to the multitude of His mercies.

Fed by Christ, nourished on His Heavenly Gifts, the Prophet's Words are made your Words: "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him."

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