

9-25-11

GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR HEAVENLY FATHER AND FROM OUR LORD AND SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST. The text is Lu 5:1-11

1] JESUS WAS STANDING BY THE SEA OF GALILEE AND PEOPLE WERE CROWDING UP TO HIM TO HEAR GOD’S WORD. 2] HE SAW TWO FISHING BOATS BEACHED BY THE LAKE. (THE FISHERMEN HAD LEFT THEM THERE AND WERE WASHING THEIR NETS.) 3] SO JESUS GOT INTO ONE OF THE BOATS – IT WAS SIMON’S [that is, Peter’s] – AND ASKED HIM TO PUT OUT A LITTLE FROM SHORE. 4] THEN JESUS SAT DOWN AND WENT ON TEACHING THE PEOPLE FROM THE BOAT. WHEN HE WAS DONE TEACHING, HE TOLD SIMON, “PUT OUT INTO DEEP WATER AND CAST YOUR NET FOR A CATCH.”

5] SIMON ANSWERED, “TEACHER, WE’VE ALREADY WORKED ALL NIGHT AND WE DIDN’T CATCH A THING, BUT IF YOU SAY SO, I’LL CAST THE NET.” 6] AND WHEN THEY DID, THEY NETTED A HUGE SCHOOL OF FISH! THE NET BROKE, 7] AND THEY SIGNALLED TO THEIR PARTNERS IN THE OTHER BOAT TO COME AND HELP THEM, AND THEY CAME AND FILLED BOTH BOATS TILL THEY WERE NEAR SINKING!

8] WHEN SIMON PETER SAW IT, HE FELL DOWN AT JESUS’ KNEES AND SAID, “LORD, GET AWAY FROM ME! I’M A SINFUL MAN!” 9] BECAUSE HE WAS AMAZED, AND ALL THE MEN IN HIS BOAT, 10] AND SIMON’S PARTNERS, TOO, JAMES AND JOHN, ZEBEDEE’S SONS, AT THE CATCH OF FISH THEY’D TAKEN. 11] BUT JESUS TOLD SIMON, “DON’T BE AFRAID. FROM NOW ON, YOU’LL BE CATCHING HUMAN BEINGS.” 12] AND WHEN THEY’D BROUGHT THEIR BOATS TO SHORE, THEY LEFT IT ALL AND FOLLOWED HIM.

Jesus told Peter, “FROM NOW ON, YOU’LL BE CATCHING HUMAN BEINGS.” He means, of course, making disciples. What about us? I mean, there aren’t going to be any more Apostles and not every Christian is called to be an evangelist. But every Christian in everything we do by Christ’s side is caught up into the Great Enterprise that ends with millions and millions of human beings caught up into the New Creation as though sin, and grief, and death had never touched them. We’ve got to grow in grace, not only for our own sake. But also because as you grow in grace, you find out that He really wants you *in* on it with Him; He really *insists* on having you in on it with Him, *and* you find out that you really *can* be in on it with Him by the way you talk, such as telling somebody, “Look, we’ve all done wrong, but Christ forgives anybody who comes to Him.” That’s simple. Or maybe, “Look, we’re all worse than we think, but we’re all loved more than we dream!” Or even just, “Look, come to church with me.”

But we've also got to be in on it by the way we *live*. And that means by the way we *love* – telling the truth, living clean: All His commandments are commandments to love, and not just now and then. No, LOVE'S NEVER GLAD ABOUT EVIL, BUT ALWAYS GLAD TO SEE WHAT'S RIGHT; LOVE'S NEVER SELFISH, NEVER RUDE, ALWAYS FORGIVES, ALWAYS ENDURES, LOVE NEVER RUNS OUT. And I'm gasping like a netted fish, way out of my element in GRACE like that. Because LOVE *is* GRACE like that. And praise God, who catches us up by grace like that *into* that grace like that, till we learn to how to breathe this new element.

Peter, that day, was in his *own* element: in his own life, in his own town, on the lake he fished every night. And he'd already welcomed Jesus into *his* life. But when it was done, V. 9] PETER WAS AMAZED, caught up out of his life into Christ's life, and twitching and gasping like a netted fish.

And here Peter thought Jesus was just after the *neighbors*, who, V. 1] WERE CROWDING UP TO JESUS WHERE HE STOOD ON THE LAKE SHORE, so thick they couldn't see Him and V. 2] JESUS SAW TWO BOATS BEACHED BY THE LAKE. And V. 3] Jesus – that *sly* Fisherman – GOT INTO PETER'S BOAT AND ASKED HIM TO PUT OUT A LITTLE FROM SHORE – so everybody could see Him, you know? And Peter was glad to do his part.

So, V. 4] JESUS SAT DOWN AND WENT ON TEACHING THE PEOPLE FROM THE BOAT. And WHEN HE WAS DONE doing what *He* does, He got into what *Peter* did. He told him, “PUT OUT INTO DEEP WATER AND CAST YOUR NET FOR A CATCH.” Which sounded like the minister saying, “Hey, let's do some commercial fishing!” And Peter said, V. 5] “TEACHER, WE'VE ALREADY WORKED ALL *NIGHT* AND WE DIDN'T CATCH A THING.”

Which means, “First of all, Reverend, the time to fish this lake is at night, and second, there's nothing out there. *WE DIDN'T CATCH A THING* and *we're fishermen*.” It's a little like, “TEACHER, in Your own element You're fabulous, but don't teach me how to *fish*”? Which is a lot like, “Lord, in Your own element, You're fabulous, but don't teach me how to raise my kids, spend my money, play my sports, run my business, run my sex life, and spend my time. Don't teach *me* how to run *my* life”? But Christ always casts His net to catch up your life *whole*. What if you say, “No”? Then you swim away to get away. You stop even surfacing for a breath now and then. And you die underwater in your own element. *IN HIM IS LIFE* and nowhere else. Everybody's got to get caught to survive.

But Peter *didn't* say, "No." He said, "IF YOU SAY SO ..." Oh, guys, whatever it is, if He *says* so So Peter took his employees with him and his partners came in the other boat, and they all go out to give the minister a ride on the lake, and then it was, "Okay, TEACHER, here's where it gets *DEEP* (little did they know) and, TEACHER, if we were actually *fishing*, TEACHER, this is how we would cast out the net." **AND THEY NETTED A HUGE SCHOOL OF FISH AND THE NET BROKE, V. 6] and V. 7] THEY SIGNALLED TO THEIR PARTNERS IN THE OTHER BOAT TO COME HELP!** It's like you're a computer programmer and your minister visits your office and you show him the program you're working on and he sits down at your desk and you're all, "Don't touch anything!" but he does and his fingers are flying and the screen starts flashing and your program's done and tons of programs you never imagined come pouring out of the computer along with A HUGE SCHOOL OF FISH.

No, wait, the FISH were in that NET at the wrong time of day in an empty lake: One second, nothing but lakewater, and the next second: LET THE WATERS TEEM WITH LIVING THINGS, netted, gasping, and all aquiver – AND THEY FILLED BOTH BOATS TILL THEY WERE NEAR *SINKING* which was much too much too much which means, "Peter, I'm not your minister. I'm your God." HOLY! HOLY! HOLY! And Peter, way out of his element, V. 8] Peter FELL DOWN AT JESUS' KNEES AND SAID, "LORD!" Not "TEACHER," but "LORD!" He said, "LORD, GET AWAY FROM ME! I'M A SINFUL MAN!" he said, gasping like Isaiah in the temple. And you understand.

When Christ brings up what's been underwater out into the open sunlight – Peter said, GET AWAY FROM ME! I can't *be* with You! I can't do this. I can't breathe! LORD, GET AWAY FROM ME!" As if to say, "You don't want to see this. You don't want to be around this. You don't want to touch this." But whatever Jesus brings up, He's already seen; He's already been around it; He's already touched it; He's already worn it on His own skin. *He's already had it on His own conscience.* YOUR GUILT ... IS ATONED FOR. He just wants us out from it, caught up and out in LOVE like that.

Peter said, "LORD, I'M A SINFUL MAN." V. 11] BUT JESUS TOLD him, "DON'T BE AFRAID. He doesn't catch us to eat us. Neither does He catch and release. He's a Fisherman who brings us up alive and gasping, but we don't die. We start living on GRACE; we start living in His LOVE, out in the open with Him, above the surface, out in the sunlight. Which is why turning back for sin and what I call my own element is sticking my head below the surface for a nice lungful of lakewater. Keep that up and you'll drown. No, He caught you up because He knows that that actually GRACE is your native element. It's what we're designed for: Getting loved by Him and then living

in love, and not now and then, but always, all the time. And I may feel that some part of me is dying. But I'm just losing my gills and I don't need them. Just breathe.

Take in the love. Like Peter, we've got to FALL AT His KNEES AND tell Him, "LORD, I'M A SINFUL MAN or woman or boy or girl. Repent: It means cough up the lakewater you've inhaled and believe: God is not ashamed to be with you in the boat. He *caught* you because He loves you and when He caught you, He pulled you *up to Him*. Breathe in the GRACE: And when we choke, He rushes in with mouth to mouth. THERE IS *NO* CONDEMNATION here. Breathe in deep: He loves me; He forgives me; He says I'm a keeper and He will not throw me back ... breathe it in – and out that LOVE will come. Whatever we breathe in, we breathe out. GRACE in, GRACE out and see? You're *breathing*. A new element.

I'm still also A SINFUL MAN – I could show you some *scales* – and Christ says, "Granted. But I'm holy enough for both of us and Peter, too, and smart enough and strong enough, so we're going out WHERE IT'S DEEP. And part of the trip – DON'T BE AFRAID – YOU'LL BE CATCHING HUMAN BEINGS.

We're already caught up in the Great Enterprise. We've just got to wake up and smell the air. And we don't have to make the miracle happen. We just – well, Peter already *knew* how to CAST a *NET*. And we already know how to *talk*. So we already know how to say the words. We even already know how to LOVE because we know how He does it with us. So breathe in His LOVE and out it'll come. Breathe in the air; breathe in the light and then LET it SHINE, SO THAT people SEE YOUR GOOD DEEDS AND come to PRAISE YOUR FATHER." And I say, "My GOOD DEEDS? What are seven LOAVES and a FEW GOOD DEEDS AMONG SO MANY? *Christ shall multiply them*. In the same way, He says, "You THROW OUT THE NET; I fill it. I fill it; you throw out the net. And *MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR THEE*. Because I ALWAYS FORGIVE, I ALWAYS ENDURE. My LOVE NEVER RUNS OUT. I don't stop. You'll grow into it." Amen.