

**The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, February 9, 2025**

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminster, Massachusetts

**Our Work, Jesus at Work**

Luke 5:1–11

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

*Eph 1:2*


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**[Jesus] said to Simon, “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” And Simon answered, “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at Your word I will let down the nets.” . . . When Simon Peter saw [the large catch], he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken. (vv 4–5, 8–9)**

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## PART ONE

Like St. Peter, we've all come up empty a time or two, perhaps a time or two in the last week. Now if I was only talking about fishing (or maybe ice fishing) we wouldn't be too concerned—for us that's a hobby, not a profession. We'd still have something to eat even if we caught nothing.

And yet we can probably relate. St. Peter spent all night casting without catching. This wasn't a deep-sea fishing trip to Florida with his buddies. It was a bone-wearying night of work. For us it would be a day in the office, pushing papers but accomplishing nothing, making phone calls but no sales. It's that important computer file you lost after working on it all day or the hours spent on a homework assignment that you misread or the dirty laundry, unwashed dishes, and piles of mail that multiply. Another day gone with nothing to show for it. Do you sometimes feel as though weariness and discouragement are the only fruit of your labor? Then you can relate to St. Peter. His was a night of fishing but no fish, casting the nets without a catch, watching the bobber refuse to budge.

You can almost hear the frustration and exasperation in St. Peter's voice as he speaks with Jesus. **“Master, we toiled all night and took nothing. But at your word I'll let down the nets”** (v 5). In other words: “I guess, if you say so.” Why not try one more time, just to make Jesus happy? After all, the fishing can't get any worse, and it might feel good to humor the carpenter from Nazareth.

Have we done our work in a similar manner? Have we ever reached the end of a day and wondered where the time went? Do we start the next day still tired and return to our duties not because we expect something to happen but only because there's nothing better to do? Having heard the Master's word, are we reluctant to do what He says? Do we think we know better than He does? But what else is there except to throw the net in one more time? At least there's food on the table and a shelter over our heads as day after day races by.

Has our work, our job search, our retirement left us pessimistic, cynical, and disappointed? Do we think that our work doesn't matter or that our time at home is wasted? Do we wonder if God is doing anything with us? It would be nice to end each day by declaring our work "very good" and to take pride in our own great catch of fish. And yet there often seems to be nothing holy or redemptive about our work. Far from saving the world, our lack of accomplishments show that we live in a broken world and need salvation.

## PART TWO

St. Peter caught nothing that night by his own labor. It was the Word of Jesus that caused him to go out into the deep and cast the nets again; the Word of Jesus produced the miraculous catch of fish. The same Word which created the seas and everything in them is the Word that blessed St. Peter's work. And isn't He also the Lord of all the earth? All depends on His blessing and benediction.

The Lord alone makes our labor profitable. St. Paul gives us this encouragement: **Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain** (1 Cor 15:58). How will we know that our labor is not in vain? Are prosperity, rewards, and promotions the mark of God's blessing upon our work? God doesn't promise a great catch of fish for every cast of the net. But He will take even our long, weary days of frustration and use them for good. Will we always understand the ways of our God? No, for His ways are not our ways. Yet we know that He is the God of all mercy and grace and faithfulness.

The work of our hands doesn't depend on the guarantee of earthly success; it depends only on the Word that God spoke over His creation in Genesis 1. There He promised to sustain and bless His creation through the work of our hands. So we cast our nets each day in the office, in the studio, and in the home, and then the Lord produces the outcome. Such work is never in vain for it is His work done through our hands. St. Peter's final cast into the depths was not a show of His fishing prowess. It was a physical demonstration that His labors depended not on Himself but on His Lord. Surely this was the strength He needed for the work ahead—not the guarantee of a great catch but the call to trust in the Lord of sky, sea, and earth. I can imagine St. Peter

many years later, now serving as a fisher of men, remembering that His work was only to cast the net of preaching. The outcome belonged to God.

The best picture of this comes not from St. Peter but from the work of our Lord. What looks more fruitless, more empty, more meaningless than His body hanging upon the cross? If there was ever cause for despair over a lifetime of labor, it came in the darkness of Good Friday. To the eyes of this world it looked like the supreme failure; but the crucifixion of Jesus was a work that God established, and from it flows every blessing that we enjoy.

Because of Christ we also can trust in God as we do our daily tasks. This call to trust comes in times of success and in times of apparent failure. Martin Luther said that we are to work in our calling with all faithfulness and not to give way to idleness on the one hand or to foolish anxiety on the other (*LW 23?*). God calls us to live all of life—at work, at home, in church—with trust in Him. For those catching fish, for those fishing for men, and for men, women, and children who serve in every calling, serve faithfully and trust God. Cast your nets week after week. Let His Word of blessing do its work.

### PART THREE

How often have we worked but not trusted? Have we, like Peter, served in our vocations because there's nothing better to do? Perhaps we've wondered about God's faithfulness to us; maybe we've grown lazy or anxious. We haven't trusted as we should. And so we fall on our knees in the smelly, dirty bottom of our boats and say, with St. Peter, "**Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord** (v 8). I didn't trust when you told me to cast my net." We've become hopelessly tangled in the net of our own sinful nature, in the muck and mire of our weeks. We say, "Depart from me, for I am a sinner. Go away, Lord. You don't need me, weak as I am. You can't use me." And we mean it. He's too good for us. We don't deserve it.

But the Lord didn't depart from Peter and He hasn't departed from us. He says, "Don't be so sure about all that. Get up. I'm not finished with you yet. I've got work for you to do! Take a look at these: My hands, my side. You think this catch of fish is something? This is only the beginning. You've hardly begun to see how much I love you."

So He offers us the Word of forgiveness—Holy Absolution. And He hauls us into this boat, the nave, the Church. Our Lord Jesus Christ doesn't cast us out. He casts His nets again and again—through Baptism, by preaching, in the Lord's Supper. Through these gifts He works a greater miracle than that amazing catch of fish many years ago; His

work is to catch men. This is the miracle: You are now a different man, a different woman, a new creation. Though we may come up empty and faithless during the week, Jesus Christ fills us with forgiveness and eternal life by His absolution.

Do we wish for work that's holy, redemptive, saving? Such was the work of our Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross. At the end of a long and weary day God invites us not to reflect on our own work but on the work which His Son did for us. With Jesus' resurrection the Father declared His sacrifice "very good," a perfect sacrifice for our sins. The work of Jesus Christ is holy, redemptive, and saving; our Baptism into Him is also a baptism of our work and of all that our hands do. Because we are holy by faith in Jesus Christ, our work also becomes holy. What we do has meaning because of what Jesus Christ has done for us.

He forgives your sins. **"Don't be afraid"** (v 10), because the blood of Christ allows us to stand before a holy God. Just as Jesus raised Peter and called Him to work in faith, so He also absolves us and calls us to live and work in faith. He sends us again to our homes and our offices, to pick up our nets and continue the fishing. The catch may be small. The work may be wearying. But we are sustained by His promises. We no longer speak of our toilsome nights or our empty nets, but we speak of our Lord Jesus Christ whose work brings us life. Having been absolved, we can now say with the Psalmist, — **"Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands; yes, establish the work of our hands!"** (Ps 90:17).

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The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

*Phil 4:7*

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*Revised from a sermon preach for the Fifth Sunday after Holy Trinity, July 16, 2006,  
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