

Sermon for the Fifth Sunday after Trinity; Luke 5:1-11

[PART I. FAITH IN ITS RELATION TO TEMPORAL BLESSINGS.]

[PETER'S MIRACULOUS CATCH OF FISHES.]

A Sermon by Martin Luther; Taken from His Church Postil; the sermon first appeared in 1522

1. This Gospel is easy for those to understand who believe, and it presents to us two thoughts, namely: Faith in its relation to temporal blessings, and faith in its relation to eternal blessings.

2. In the first place Christ shows that those who believe on him will certainly have sufficient also for this present life. And this he does in that he gives Peter and his partners such a great multitude of fishes, more than they had any reason to expect; also, in that Christ also provides for the feeding of our stomachs, if it were not only for our cursed unbelief. For behold Peter and look deep into his heart and you will find, that he had no idea that he should catch so many fishes; then God came and drove the fish into the net, and more than all the disciples had desired.

3. Therefore this is in example that all who believe will have enough for their temporal needs; but those who do not believe can never get enough and have no rest in scheming how to secure riches, by which they fall into all kinds of vice. Then comes to pass what Paul in I Tim. 6:6-10 says: "But godliness with contentment is great gain; for we brought nothing into the world, for neither can we carry anything out; but having food and covering we shall be therewith content. But they that are minded to be rich fall into a temptation and a snare and many foolish and hurtful lusts, such as drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil: which some reaching after have been led astray from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

4. Now this passage of St. Paul shows clearly what follows our unbelief, namely, that he who strives after possessions and will become rich, must fall into the temptations and snares of the devil. These we cannot see, for they are spiritual. However if we could see the harm and ruin he does in spiritual things as he does in corporal things, then we would be good preachers. For we see publicly how an unbelieving man scrapes and does violence to everybody in order that he may scratch together something in which he may place his confidence, and say: Yea, now I have enough. Thus we see, what an avaricious, unfriendly thing unbelief is; for it is a benefit to no one, it sells no one anything unless it sees its own advantage in doing so.

5. For it has ever been a curse that we cannot trust God even for the daily food our stomachs crave, and that we continually think we are to die from hunger; and yet, we are to have enough, as Christ in Mat. 6:25[f]. says: "Therefore I say to you, Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body what ye shall I put on. Is not the life more than the food, and the

body than the raiment? Behold the birds of the heaven, that they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and Your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not ye of more value than they? And which, of you by being anxious can add one cubit onto the measure of his life? And why are ye anxious concerning raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But If God doth so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast Into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Be not therefore anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? or With what shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek; for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things will be added unto you. Be not therefore anxious about tomorrow; for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

6. Here you see how God cares for the birds and flowers, and adorns them so beautifully; much more will he give us what we need; and yet we cannot trust him. So successfully has the devil taken us captive by his snares. If one comes now so far that he is not satisfied and does not trust God, then love must at once cease, so that he does no one any good, but he scratches together everything only on his own heap.

7. And in this way the calling of the priests and monks arose; only in order that they might help themselves and feed their stomachs, and not being permitted to work they ran into the cloisters. And the proverb is true: Despair makes monks; yea, not only monks, but also priests, bishops, and popes; for they do not trust God that he is able to feed and clothe them, and only think how they may fortify themselves against all want and poverty. All this is the life of unbelief. Then they go and keep strumpets or, commit adultery, which are the fruits that follow unbelief; for they never trusted God, that he was able to sustain them, if they took unto themselves wives and remained out of the monasteries.

8. Now, here is an example, that excites us to trust in God, and first for the needs of the stomach; since he cares for us also in temporal things. This we see here in the case of Peter, when he thus caught a great multitude of fishes, more than filled their boats. From this it is clearly shown God will forsake no one, each, must have what, he needs if he trusts in God alone; as Ps. 37,35 says: "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." There is no lack of provisions, only a lack of faith; before that should take place the angels would come and minister unto us. Therefore the fact that the people suffer now such need, is caused only by unbelief.

9 And although God is near us and will give us what we need, yet he requires on our part both work and hope, even if he delay for a time; therefore he gives Peter here a catch of fishes and says: "Put out into the deep, and let down your nets for a catch."

10. As if the Lord would say: Let down the nets, and do the work that belongs to a fisherman, and let me care for the rest. The care or solicitude shall not be thine but mine, and the work thine. We however wish to turn this around for Christ: we want the care and let him have the work. Hence it is

that everyone strives after usury, and hoards money so that they may never need to work.

11. Therefore if you wish to lead a truly Christian life, let thy God see to it how the fishes come into your net, and go and enter some calling in life that you may labour . But we all wish to fill such positions, where we do not need to labour ; that has ever been the trick of the devil. And because of this we became monks and priests, only in order that we might live like noblemen and would not need to work. Moved by this mothers left their children go to school, in order that they might have good days and serve God. In this way it came so far that people didn't know what good living was; and yet God commanded and took pleasure in it, that man should eat his bread in sweat; as he said to Adam: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread," Gen. 3:19. And the deeper you stick in the law, the better It is. Therefore labour and believe, and let God rule unhindered.

12. If we speak of faith and are to lean upon God and let him care for us, then they say: Yes, I must believe a long time before a roasted dove flies into my mouth, if I do not labour . Yes it is true, you must toil, for you are commanded to do so: but let thy God provide for you. Believe and labour , then will not only a dove but a roasted goose fly into your mouth.

13. But to these belong also another part, namely, that we should hope, even if God does delay for a time. Hence Christ here left them toil all the night without catching anything and it seemed he would permit them to die of hunger. Peter might have well thought since he fished so long and caught nothing: now God will let the stomach languish. But he despairs not, continues to labour , and stands and hopes. Then God comes and gives him such a great multitude of fishes all at once, and more than he had been able to catch in eight days.

14. Therefore you must learn this part well, that you are to work and hope, even if God should delay a little and let you toil in your sweat, so that you imagine your labour is now lost. Then you must be wise and learn to know your God and to trust in him. Then he arrives and gives you more than you need, as he does here to Peter. Therefore if God has already delayed, only remember in the example of Peter there was also a little delay and yet it richly came. Thus it strikes in the time of his good pleasure; therefore do not despair, but hope and then thy works will be golden and pleasing to him; and then hope waits patiently, when God withdraws from us and does not do at once what we earnestly wish. Therefore he must make an appendix and hang on it a costly stone that thy works may become important. This precious stone is faith; but the works of unbelievers are stubble, for they are not built upon faith. This is the first part of our Gospel, now follows the second.

Part II. Faith in its Relation to Eternal Blessings.

15. After the disciples caught the fishes and tasted the fruit of faith, their faith increased and grew. Now, we must first come to the point that we can commit unto God the care of our stomachs. For whoever cannot entrust that to God, can never commit unto him his soul. But this is only the faith of the child, where we learn to go to the public bank and continue to suck our mother's breast. Yet, by this we must learn to confide our soul to God for his keeping. This to-day's Gospel aims to do, When it says: But Simon Peter, when he saw it, fell down at Jesus knees, saying, Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was amazed, and all that were with him, at the catch of the

fishes which they had taken.

16. Let Peter here be a figure of those who should believe in the eternal possessions, and substitute for him the conscience, that now waits and looks for temporal blessings and possessions. A sinful conscience by reason of its nature is apt to do just as Peter does here, flee from its Saviour, and think: O, God I am not worthy to be saved and sit among the saints and angels! Oh, that treasure is far too high for me! Here the narrow small conscience cannot grasp these great treasures, but thinks: Yes, if I were as St. Peter and Paul, then I might believe it. This is foolish; for should you wish to establish yourself upon your holiness, then you would build on the sand. No, not so; but, do like St. Peter. For in that he considered himself so unworthy, then he became first worthy. And just because you are a sinful person, you must trust. Here you must open wide your conscience and greatly expand your heart in order that grace may flow freely into them.

17. If you have now learned to know God, then refuse him nothing whatever; that is, if we behold the great treasures then we should not despair. It is proper that we know ourselves, and the more thoroughly we do this the better; but you must not reject grace because of your sins. For if you find that your conscience struggles and would drive you to despair, then you are most comfortable and fortunate; then you will find the consolation in your conscience, and say like Micah 7:18-19: "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and casts their sins into the sea and drowns them?" All gods that do not take away sins are idols. Therefore Micah well says, that there is no God like our God; for other gods wish to discover righteousness, but our God brings it; God the Lord brings it and does not discover it. Therefore you must not despair, although your conscience struggles and feels its sins; for the more disgraced you are, the quicker God imparts grace.

18. Now the great multitude of people go and dress themselves like the kitten does, and think God will then accept them. No, the Scriptures praise God that he takes away sins and casts them into the ocean. We cannot help our sins by our works nor become righteous by means of any power within ourselves; God, and no one else, will do that, without merit and without works, out of pure grace; as in Is. 43:22 he says: "I, even I, am he that blot out thy transgressions for mine own sake: and I will not remember thy sins." And thus it must be, or you will never obtain a cheerful conscience. Therefore when Peter said, "I am a sinful man," he did right. It is true he had indeed cause to fear and humble himself; but he was constrained not to reject God, but to accept him.

19. Therefore, if I feel my sins and become like St. Peter, and would run away from God; then I must first turn and approach nearer and nearer to him. For if God had fled and had not desired to take away your sins, he would not have come to you and run after you. Therefore the more you feel that you are a sinful man and the more you wish to flee, from God, the more you should press forward to him; mark that well. For as St. Peter does here, so do all consciences that are terrified before their sins, they wish to flee from God and seek another idol. Then, do not desist, but approach God with fresh confidence and hold to him. On the other hand, if we flee from him and seek work righteousness and obtain help from another God, and afterwards come to the true God; then we will find him not like the foolish virgins, to whom, while they went to buy oil, the door was closed. Mat. 25,10.

20 But what did Christ do, when Peter humbled himself and in the face of great fear and terror he asked the Lord to depart from him? Did he let him stick in his despair? No, but he came to him, comforted him and said: "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men."

21. These are evangelical or Gospel words, that comfort weak hearts. And just in this way God makes our work and temptation golden before our eyes. Therefore observe now, how God provides for our bodies, in that he here gives Peter a great multitude of fishes, when he would have had enough with two, and in like manner satisfies and enriches him spiritually, so that he could from his fulness impart to others, and thus he made him a natural and a spiritual fisherman; a natural fisherman in that he caught a great multitude of fishes which he could sell; a spiritual fisherman in that he should henceforth catch men; for he had now the Gospel, by which he should gather the people and enlarge the kingdom of Christ.

22. Behold, thus it comes to pass: If one believes, God gives him so much that he is able to help all people, outwardly with his property and gifts; and from within he breaks forth, teaches others and makes them inwardly rich also, for such a person cannot keep silent, he must declare to others what he experienced; as Pa. 51:10-13 says: "Create in me a clean heart, O God. and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from in thy presence; and take not thy holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with a willing spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee." Also in another Psalm, 116:20, David says, "I believe, therefore I will speak." , This comes to pass thus: If I believe, I know God and then I see what other people lack, and go and preach to them the Gospel.

23. Thus we see in this Gospel how God cares for his own and how he sustains them temporally and spiritually both in body and soul. But where for the time there is need, it is certainly a gauge of our unbelief or because we lately first began to believe. For when faith is still new and small, its blessings at the time are small and insignificant, to the end that we should learn to know and trust God. But if we are come to the point that we freely trust God, then we will be in want of nothing, for God then fills us with temporal and spiritual blessings, and with such superabundant treasures so that we are able to help all people. That is called making the poor people rich and feeding the hungry. This is sufficient on today's Gospel.

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