

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, so often and in many ways we offend You and Your Laws. We pray, Lord, that You would continue to seek and call us, that we hear Your word, repent of our sins, and, at last, enter into Your heavenly home. We pray this all in Jesus' name. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in the Gospel according to Saint Luke the fifth chapter beginning at the first verse and we read in Jesus' name:

So it was, as the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret, ² and saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing their nets. ³ Then He got into one

of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat. ⁴ When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." ⁵ But Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net." ⁶ And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. ⁷ So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸ When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" ⁹ For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; ¹⁰ and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to

Simon, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men." ¹¹ So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him.

Heavenly Father these are Your words and therefore they are the truth. We pray, Lord, that You would increase our faith through them. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

You are just like a fish, maybe even like a goldfish at times. I know, I've forgotten my evolutionary processes and thus I am not calling you the descendants of apes... No, I am calling you goldfish. Of course, I could also reference the fact that you are like sheep, each going their own way and getting lost all the time, but for this weekend I prefer goldfish as it fits very well with the text.

You are like goldfish in a couple of different ways. The first way that I would liken you to goldfish is when it comes to memory. So often it is said that a goldfish has about a three-second memory. Whether this is completely accurate or not is not exactly known, because how can you really test the memory of a goldfish. But in the same vain we have about a three second memory, don't we? We come to church, we hear God's word, we listen while here, and then we walk out the doors and we forget. Our three second memory kicks into overdrive once we are outside of these walls. We know the hurt and pain that sin causes and yet we continue to do it. We know the agony that we caused Christ and yet we continue to live sinful lives. We have a three second memory when it comes to so much about God, our sins, and our Savior.

And in the same vain we are just like goldfish, or like fish, in that we love to live

in our own pretty little bubble and we often do not concern ourselves with the outside. We have our bowl, our lake, our church, and we do not worry ourselves with what is happening around us... especially when it comes to the faith of others.

These same problems existed during the days of the prophet Jeremiah. The people were about to be carried away from Jerusalem... and they would not turn from their ways. They knew God, they knew His laws, they knew His commands... and they were like goldfish. They did not care, they ‘forgot,’ they ignored, and they were very content in their own little bowl. And God had a message for them, “Behold, I am sending many fishers,’ declares the Lord, ‘and they shall catch them.’” Yes, friends, God is going to send many fishers... and as we learn from Jesus, these will be ***Fishers of men.***

Yes, each and every one of us needs to be caught and praise God that we have been caught. But still, week in and week out we need to be caught again and again. As Koren says, ***“Don’t we come (to church/Christ) on our own? This is exactly what we don’t do. We are by nature unwilling and unable, as we confess in the Third Article. This unwillingness of ours must be overcome and we ourselves must be brought to the Savior.”***

If it were up to us we would spend our Sunday mornings at home watching television, or surfing the internet, or sitting at a concert/music festival, or doing just about anything else... but hearing God’s word would not rank at all. In fact, we would rather listen to our worst enemy and find holes in his argument, but not God’s word. We would rather listen to the sound of grass growing, but not God’s word. We would rather listen to squirrels as they constantly

irritate us running around and getting out adrenaline going, but not God's word. So many things we would rather do... and hearing God's word is not anywhere on that list.

In fact, in our day and age we have allowed ourselves to be overburdened with work and other jobs and now they get in the way of hearing God's word. Sorry, I can't come to church because I have to work. Sorry, I can't come to church this is the only day of the week that I'm allowed to get overtime. Sorry, I can't go to church because my job and its security is more important.

Yes, we all need jobs, we all need income... but at what cost? Are we willing to put our jobs and our 'well-beings' above God and His word? Are we willing to lose our salvation in order that we have one more month of cable and internet? Are we willing to give up God and all that He has done for

us so that we can make sure that the job we complain about constantly is still available for us next week?

I can't go to church because I am choosing to work on Sunday mornings. I can't go to church because Sunday is the ONLY day that I can work. I can't go to church because my job requires that I work on Sundays... and then ask, what am I putting first at this time?

Gerhard says, ***“The fact is that we must serve the Lord God in the midst of our vocation by true faith within our heart, by godly reverence and love, by showing love to our neighbor, and by patient and humble expectation of divine blessings... Therefore, take care first of your soul; take Christ into the little boat of your heart; let Him teach and work in it; then your work will be blessed.”***

And yet, how often do we NOT do this? How often do we go to work and we know that is not the place for God? How often do we perform our vocation and never show forth the love, mercy, and grace of Christ to co-workers and others? How often do we perform our 'vocational' duties and completely exclude God?

And it is when we do this that we break the Third Commandment: keep holy the day of rest, the Sabbath day. How? By not despising God's word and preaching... by wanting to be in God's presence and hear about Him and all that He has done for us. And yet we break it... But Jesus did not.

In fact Jesus perfectly fulfilled all of the commandments for us. He kept all of the laws holy and perfect. He obeyed God and did everything required of the law. He focused on God and His word. He made God the priority in His life. He made sure to clear time to hear His word and to be with Him

alone. Jesus is the perfect child of God... and we are not.

And in being the perfect child of God, the world hated Him. The world wanted nothing to do with Jesus and His teachings and His love... and so they crucified Him. They took Jesus, beat Him, mocked Him, ridiculed Him, and hung Him on the cross. Jesus died because the world hated Him... and Jesus died because we sin.

Jesus died on the cross to bear all of our sins and all of our guilt and all of our punishment. As He hung on the cross He cared about us. His focus was still in performing all the works of God, but He also focused on us. He cared so much about us that He chose to bear His cross for us, He cared so much that He chose to die for us.

And three days later Jesus Christ rose from the dead. He rose to assure us that our sins

are forgiven. He rose to proclaim to us that through faith in Him our spot in heaven is reserved and assured. He rose because He has defeated sin, death, and hell... for us. Jesus lived, died, and rose for each and every one of us, for all of our sins, and for our salvation.

This is the most important thing that you will hear all week, so please listen carefully: Jesus lived, died, and rose again for you, and now through faith in our Savior you have heaven waiting. There is nothing that is more important and there is nothing that should so preoccupy your time than knowing your Savior and all that He has done for you. Jesus loves you. Jesus cares for you. Jesus has saved you. And Jesus provides for you.

Consider the words of Christ as found in the gospel of Matthew, ***“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we***

wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

When we seek God first and all that He has provided and done, then the rest will fall into place. When we try to accomplish things on our own, we then see the futility of our ways immediately. And so did Peter and the other disciples. They fished all night and caught nothing... and now they are cleaning their nets. They have given up... but then they hear the small still voice of Christ calling out to them. And once they heard Christ and listened to His word and believed in Him, then they had more than they could have ever hoped for.

And that is how it is with us: when we focus on Christ and all that He has done then God

promises to care for us and love us. When we seek first the kingdom of God, we know that He will provide everything else.

And with this faith in our hearts and this word in our minds and mouths, God has called all of us to be fishers of men. Taking His word and catching all of the lost 'goldfish' and finding all the lost sheep. Bringing His word to people and allowing them to be 'caught' by God's word. Letting them see their sin... but most importantly letting them see their Savior. This is what God has called us to do and He provides all the resources, tools, and words that we would ever need.

Dear friends in Christ, even though at times we act like goldfish, I pray that more often we are like elephants... they are the ones who remember everything. May we take God at His word, trust in Him, rely on Him, know that He provides... and may we also

not trust in anything else. When God is our all in all, then we have chosen the good portion, we have chosen the one thing needful, and when we seek first His kingdom, we know that He will provide all things that we could ever need.

And also, dear friends, I pray that we can take this message of Christ and go and catch other men. Bring them in to the boat of the church so that they can be near to Christ and hear His word and grow in faith and holiness... just like we do.

Thanks be to God that He has caught me with His word and His sacraments. Thanks be to God that He has allowed me to take His message of love, mercy, and peace to those around me. And thanks be to God that He has called His own fishermen of men... of whom He has made me one.

Thanks be to God. Amen.