

Luke 5:1-11
Fifth Sunday after Epiphany
February 6, 2022

There is one essential difference between biblical Christianity and manmade religions. It can be capsulized in the alternatives "do" and "done." The Bible reveals how God solved the problem of sin by sending Jesus, who did it all for us. Other approaches to a relationship with a divine being look to human efforts. Do this: offer sacrifices, make a pilgrimage, some sort of task to achieve oneness with their concept of a god or to remove what is wrong. It is a natural opinion. You make a mess, it's up to you to clean it up. That attitude creeps into false teachings of Christian groups as well when they place any reliance on self to obtain favor from God. The problem is it doesn't work and there is that sense of failure or at least uncertainty instead of the peace God wants you to have.

I submit that we see the truth in the incident before us in today's Gospel, the calling of the first disciples.

JESUS GRANTS GREAT BLESSINGS

- I. As he preaches the Word
- II. As he shows his deity
- III. As he calls to service

Jesus attracted hearers as he preached the Word and brought great blessings to them. People were excited, yes, as he performed miracles. In last week's Gospel there were healings and curing of demon possession. Many came to him and wanted him to stay there at Capernaum. But he moved on. They kept looking for him and following him. He traveled along the shore of the Sea of Galilee (here called Gennesaret, an alternate name from a territory on the west side), "with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God." They were not just curious or seeking miracles. His teaching was important to them. His manner was different from what they commonly heard. He showed clear understanding of the message. He taught with authority. They were thirsting for the Word. Their attitude was evident in their action of crowding around him. They surrounded him, pressed toward him, each trying to get closer to the front so as not to miss a word. However, their actions also made it difficult for him to address all of them. So he utilized a nearby boat, which happened to belong to Peter. From there, a bit away from shore, he addressed the crowd.

It was with good reason that the people were eager to hear the Savior. He spoke of the kingdom of God, which is his rule in hearts by faith. He brought the solution to

sin, which pollutes our life and properly condemns us to suffering now and forever. He was bringing forgiveness for sins as he would offer himself as the sacrifice to reconcile us to his heavenly Father. It was a free gift with no doing by mankind required.

Jesus also supplied what we lack: a holy life as he kept every aspect of divine law as our substitute and gave us the standing of holy in God's sight. No wonder they clamored to hear him and listened for a large part of the morning.

Jesus grants the same great blessings to us. Our need is no less than that of his fellow citizens back then. Time has passed, many centuries, and the world has seen advances in science, technology, travel and conveniences. Our lifespan is a bit longer but sin has not been solved by our achievements. We recognize it from the conditions of our world and from our own life as we reflect on our behavior compared with God's law. We are not right with God nor with our fellow human beings. God's solution in Jesus is exactly what we need and he offers it to us abundantly. Our homes have easy access to the printed Word and likely include several copies of the Bible. You can find it on your phone as well. We are privileged to live in a land where we can gather with regular frequency to worship, to study the Bible and to receive the sacraments of baptism and communion. With eagerness crowd around the Savior and receive the precious blessings he grants, especially the good news of his love and forgiveness.

II.

Jesus also grants great blessings as he shows his deity. He did so that day on the Sea of Galilee. "When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.'" I do not have much experience with fishing, but I'm told that advice goes against the instincts of a commercial fisherman like Peter. He voiced what had recently happened—he and his associates had spent the night fishing the shallow banks near the shore where they would normally expect the best results. "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything." But he also had previous contact with Jesus. There had been the healing of his mother-in-law's fever that we heard about last Sunday. So he recognized Jesus' authority and agreed to the action. "But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

It was a test of Peter's faith. It overruled his reason and experience. But he was blessed when following the Savior. It sounds like mere moments passed. "When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break." It was far more than anyone could have imagined. They summoned help

from their partners. Even two boats were nearly swamped, the catch was so great. God is not stingy when he blesses. It was a miracle. Jesus showed he is true God.

The miracle brought blessings to their lives. The catch could provide income for Peter and his family and the other workers involved. It would also feed those who bought their meals from the fishermen. We recognize great blessings as we experience God's physical care in our daily lives. We are grateful, for we depend on the Lord.

The demonstration filled Peter with a bigger blessing. He realized clearly that he was in the presence of God. The Lord is holy and supreme over all. That realization produced another impression: "I'm not holy and I don't deserve to be in his presence." "When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!'" He had no selfish desire for more, but in the process he got something more. He had a stronger faith that Jesus was the promised Messiah, his Savior.

He shows his deity in his blessings on our lives as well. God's daily goodness amazes us. Everything we have comes from him. When we realize how he has blessed us, we are grateful. It impresses on us our unworthiness. We don't deserve any of it. Yet he doesn't leave us either. He stays with us and strengthens our relationship so we are more blessed. He forgives our sins and grants us spiritual life to believe in him, resulting in our worship and praise for all he has done for us in body and soul, for life and for eternity.

III.

Further blessings come as he calls to service. The call went out in the text to Peter, James and John. "Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." They would have a new line of work. First they would be fulltime trainees learning from Jesus. Later they would be sent to proclaim his message. There was a similar action of catching involved in the new work but they would be using a much different tool, the gospel instead of a fishing net. And the result would be vastly different. Fish died after the fishermen caught them and they were broiled or baked for eating. When the men caught people for faith they were giving them life.

We note the power of the Lord's call as they immediately left their former occupation behind. They gave up their boats, fish, job, family and home. Others could attend to those details. The work of Jesus was of first importance.

We might be surprised at our Lord's choice of workers. These men were not skilled orators or university educated scholars. They were ordinary, common men. But the power of God would go with them. They would see more miracles as they went forward. Many by Jesus: more healings and powers over nature, another marvelous catch of fish before he left this earth. They would follow him through trial and trouble, see him on the cross, but also meet the risen Jesus. More importantly, they would see many people brought to faith. Each conversion is a miracle of the Holy Spirit, and they would occur through their ministry as well. Jump ahead, for example, to the day of Pentecost when three thousand were baptized after Peter's sermon.

After seeing this calling of men who would later be sent out as apostles and hearing in the First Lesson of the call of Isaiah as a prophet, we may think of fulltime church workers as Jesus still calls to service. A definite need exists with our synod experiencing a shortage of pastors these days, as you are well aware with our present vacancy and the number of calls issued. That need prompts us to pray for workers and to encourage young people and those considering a second career to look at church work. The shortage of teachers for our Christian schools is also large.

Jesus' call to service is more personal. He is calling you. It is a fulltime call as well. There are no part-time Christians. Live every moment as a child of God and an ambassador for the Savior. Glorify him in all your roles, as a parent, as a worker, as a friend. Serve in the work of the congregation as you encourage your fellow members to faithfulness. The talents he has given you are for use as long as you have them. Again we may be surprised he hasn't sent out others who seem more qualified, but he promises to equip and bless each of us in our lives as his servants. He knows what he is doing and will produce the desired results.

Thinking back to the introduction, you might be asking, isn't that a "doing", not a "done for us" by Jesus? Yes, but it is for an entirely different reason. Our service as Christians is responding to what God has done for us, especially for the salvation we have received from Jesus. We are not seeking to make our relationship right with God but rejoicing that Jesus has made it right for us.

Our service flows naturally from a grateful heart. It is a privilege, not a slavish duty. Amazing results will also come as Jesus calls us to service. Hear the Word your Savior proclaims, receive the great blessings of the divine Son of God and offer joyful service. He is calling you.