

Rev. Arthur Litke
"HIS CALL"
Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany
February 6, 2022
Zion Lutheran Church
Fort Wayne, Indiana

TEXT: Luke 5:1-11 (ESV)

One of the things that has always impressed me about the earthly ministry of Jesus is His boldness. Wherever He went, He spoke with such authority. He walked up to Matthew the tax collector while the man was at work and matter-of-factly said to him: "Follow Me" (Matthew 9:9). He walked into the house of Jairus, where the man's daughter had just died, and He expelled the mourners, telling them that the girl was not dead at all, but only sleeping! At Bethany He ordered the reopening of Lazarus' grave four days after His friend had been buried there. Later He sent two disciples to commandeer a donkey for His triumphant ride into Jerusalem. And even on the eve of His death He sent a couple of His disciples to prepare the Passover meal in a house that neither He nor they owned. In today's Gospel He simply gets into a boat without any invitation from its owner and begins to use it as a makeshift pulpit. If that isn't enough, He tells Simon, the owner, to go out into deeper water and prepare for a catch of fish that Simon knows isn't there, since he and his partners had just spent the entire night fishing and caught nothing.

The most amazing thing about all of this is that His boldness is not without cause. Jesus is the Lord of all, so He has every right and responsibility to take command. We can easily see this by looking at the results: Matthew followed Jesus and his life was transformed by the Gospel. Two thousand years later his story still brings encouragement and hope to the outcasts of today. At the Word of Jesus both Jairus' daughter and Lazarus rose from death and lived again. The Palm Sunday donkey and the upper room each had their part to play in the story of our redemption through the sacrifice of the Son of God. The results of today's Gospel are profound as well--not only because of the great catch of fish and Simon being brought to faith, but also because of what this story has to tell us about Jesus' call to us and our response to His call.

The first thing that we learn here about Jesus' call is certainly related to His boldness. It is Jesus, and He alone, who always takes the initiative in calling us to faith and discipleship. He doesn't wait for us to "invite Him into our hearts," as some suppose. He doesn't ask us to apply for the position of disciple. He doesn't wait until we are ready to believe in Him or until we show some potential. A sign that I once saw in front of a church made this point. It happened to be a Roman Catholic church, but I thought that the message on that sign was very Lutheran. It read: "God doesn't call the qualified; He qualifies the called." In His mercy God reaches down to us by the power of the Holy Spirit with the Good News of the Gospel and claims us as His own. He does this through the means of grace that He has appointed: the Word of God (specifically the Gospel of Christ) and the Sacraments (specifically Holy Baptism). Whichever of these means speaks to a person's heart first is the instrument through which the Spirit creates saving faith in that person. For me, it was my Baptism when I was only three weeks old. I certainly didn't know or understand what was happening to me, nor could I articulate

my faith for some time, but the fact that I am a believer today is proof to me that I was made a child of God at that time. It was the Holy Spirit who called Simon Peter to faith and discipleship and it is the Holy Spirit who calls us as well.

The boldness with which the Spirit of Christ speaks to sinners like us today through the means of grace is the same boldness with which Jesus spoke when He walked this earth. In Word and Sacrament He continues to say to us: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are Mine” (Isaiah 43:1) and He says: “Take heart, . . . your sins are forgiven” (Matthew 9:2) and He says: “Take and eat, this is My body, given for you” (Matthew 26:26; Luke 22:19) “Drink this. This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.” (Matthew 26:27; Luke 22:20) He speaks and it is so. As God the Father called creation into existence in the beginning through His Word, God the Son speaks today through His Holy Spirit to call sinners to repentance and New Life in Him.

How do we typically respond to the Savior’s call to faith and discipleship? I think we can get a pretty good idea from looking at Simon’s reaction to being in the presence of the Christ. At first he is skeptical, as people often are. When Jesus tells him to go out into deeper water for a catch, Simon is quick to tell the Lord that there are no fish to be found out there. He knows, because he’s been out there all night with his partners and they haven’t caught a thing. He does go out and let down the nets at Jesus’ bidding, but it is clear that he’s doing it only to humor Jesus. If we’re going to be honest, I think we’ll have to admit that our initial reaction to the Gospel is often as skeptical as that of Simon Peter. We are also reluctant to believe that forgiveness and New Life--indeed, all of the blessings of the Gospel--are ours as a free gift because of our redemption from sin, accomplished by our Savior Jesus Christ through His perfect life and innocent death and confirmed by His resurrection from the dead.

But, thank God, by the power of the Holy Spirit skepticism gives way to humility and faith. When Simon Peter was convinced that Jesus was indeed the Lord, He was humbled--even terrified--at the thought of being in the presence of the Holy One. “Depart from me,” he said, “for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8). Convicted of his sin by the mere presence of holiness, he realized that he was not worthy to stand in God’s presence. That is also a typically human reaction. That’s why so many people make a career of avoiding God and anything that reminds them of God. It’s easier for them to just pretend that there is no God or that God has nothing in common with the people who speak in His name or that God doesn’t care about them and their sin. But when Simon heard the Good News--Jesus’ Word of encouragement and His invitation to faith and discipleship--he, with the others, “left everything and followed Him.” We have likewise been called by the Gospel to forsake our sin and the fear that it generates within us and to take comfort in the forgiveness of our Savior, finding meaning and purpose for our lives in Him.

In this world of ours, which is lacking in so many ways, the Lord Jesus, through the power of His Holy Spirit, supplies what is lacking. He uses the Law to break through our spiritual indifference and to give us a knowledge of our sin and a fear of the punishment that we deserve. Having humbled us in this way, He then uses the Gospel to give to us the forgiveness of our sins and the sure hope of New Life in Him. Having experienced all of this, He then calls us to share with others this same Word of Law and Gospel that the Spirit has used to work faith in our hearts. We are His willing

instruments, always speaking and acting with boldness and confidence, because we speak and act in the name of Jesus, the crucified and risen One. Sound impossible? It is, if we rely on our own strength, but the Good News is that He Himself is the One who makes it happen--through us and, if necessary, in spite of us.

Amen.

May the God who caused light to shine out of darkness cause you to increase and abound in love toward one another and toward all people, as His love abounds for us; and may the glory of His Son be manifested to you and in you, that you may be witnesses to all nations now and until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and He will do it. Amen.