

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

It is still the season of Epiphany, and so, we see Jesus manifesting His Divine glory in another miracle — “Anthems be to Thee addressed, God in man made manifest” (LSB394:1).

Yet, the miracle He performs is not a showy spectacle of Divine splendor. It is done quite simply, yet it is enough to cause the soon-to-be great apostle to fall before Jesus’ knees in humble fear.

You remember from last Sunday, Jesus told us of His purpose for coming among us. It was, in part, to “*preach the good news of the kingdom of God*” (Luke 4:43), to proclaim that the kingdom of God had come in His person. You know Jesus came also for this purpose, to glorify the Father, dying as a grain that falls to the ground, and rising up, bearing fruit. Jesus came to be “*lifted up from the earth*” and “*draw all people to [Himself]*” (John 12:24, 32).

And so, we find Jesus in our Gospel today doing His duty. He was beside the Sea of Galilee, sometimes called the Lake of Gennesaret. He was preaching “*the word of God.*” That’s what the crowd that had gathered around Jesus came to hear. Perhaps, it was hard to hear, or perhaps the people were eager to hear Him, but they were “*pressing in on him,*” Luke reports, pressing in to hear the word of God.

Why do we come to church? Is it not to hear the word of God? To hear “Thus says the Lord”? To hear of things heavenly and eternal? Oh, when we exit out in the Great Hall, we may, like you’ll hear elsewhere, sometimes venture into other topics, things mundane and common:

like the weather — it got icy and slick at the end of service last Sunday; got some more ice last night; any trouble getting to church?

like current events around Fort Wayne or the nation — no casino in New Haven ... not this year ... they haven’t given up, though; we had a rash of aviation mishaps recently; what’s going on in our skies?

like the latest happenings in sports or entertainment — the Super Bowl is this afternoon; can’t wait! I just watch because of the commercials; I just tune in for the half-time show. Blah, blah, blah!

And don’t get me wrong. There’s nothing wrong with such conversations, not in the Great Hall, and not around the office water cooler. It’s just not why we come to

church. We don't come to hear Pastor preach about the icy roads or a casino. FYI, I'm not very good on icy roads, and I don't really like casinos. You don't come on Super Bowl Sunday to hear Pastor talk about the Chiefs or the Eagles, Mahomes or Hurts, or Travis Kelce and Taylor Swift. I'll watch, but I don't have any real interest in who wins.

Rather, we come to hear Jesus' words come out of Pastor's mouth. In fact, as your pastor, I feel “*pressed*” to deliver that to you.

Now, because the crowd pressed in so closely to Jesus, He needed a little bit of separation from them; He needed a pulpit. Peter's boat was available, and so He got on, and they “*put out a little way from the shore.*” And Jesus sat down to preach. We know that Jesus preached the good news, but we don't have the exact words that He spoke.

We do, on the other hand, have words that He spoke after He had finished preaching. Jesus turned to Peter and told him to go “*out into the deep [water] and let down your nets for a catch.*”

Now, this was an extraordinary word. Peter was the fisherman, not Jesus! Peter was the expert! Moreover, Peter and compatriots had labored all night long without success. Peter told Jesus that. So, why should he listen to this novice? Nevertheless, he did. Peter set aside his expertise and experience and did as Jesus told him. And he was rewarded.

Jesus (and God's word more broadly) similarly instructs us, and sometimes what they teach seems incredible, even unreasonable. We more sophisticated, scientific people think we know better. A seven day creation? How unscientific! How incredible! A worldwide flood that destroyed all life except for what was saved on an Ark? That's impossible! Unreasonable! Plagues afflicting Egypt at Moses' beck and call? Some of which spared the land of Goshen where Israel lived? No way! Things like that don't happen! Israel crossing the Red Sea on dry ground, a wall of water on either side? That's unreasonable.

Or in the New Testament: God taking on flesh from a virgin? Unbelievable! A star leading Gentiles to the baby Jesus? No way! Turning water into wine? And later wine to blood and bread to body? Impossible! Making “Palsied limbs and fainting soul [whole]”? “Quelling all the devil's might”? Simpletons' superstitions. Unreasonable for modern people! How often do we cast aside God's word because it does not match the sensibilities of us modern people!

For Peter, it was the opposite. He cast aside his own reason and obeyed Jesus’ word. He responded to Jesus’ unreasonable request with: “*at your word I will let down the nets*” ... “*at your word ...*”

Saints, this must be our response, too. “At your word, Lord, we do believe these incredible things, for we know who You are,” even as we heard the demons bear witness last week: Jesus is “*the Holy One of God*”; Jesus is “*the Son of God*” (Luke 4:34, 41). And we know: “*nothing will be impossible with God*” (Luke 1:37). Surely, these things, impossible for man, are not at all unreasonable; our reason can grasp them. We respond: these are the mighty works of God.

Similarly, what God teaches us about holy living according to the Ten Commandments — about loving Him alone, using His name properly, attending to His word, about honoring the authorities God gives for our good, caring for others’ physical well-being, using our bodies honorably according to God’s will, etc. — these things are surely out of step with the world. But we seek to do them — “*at your word, Lord,*” knowing that God’s ways are good and good for us.

When, at Jesus’ word, Peter’s nets were filled with the enormous catch of fish, Peter realized who was in his boat. No longer just “*Master,*” but “*Lord!*” He fell on his face in fear before Jesus’ knees and admitted: “*I am a sinful man*”; “*Depart from me.*”

But Jesus did not depart. He spoke another word that we hear in the Gospel “*Do not be afraid, Peter. Your failures, your doubts, your sins do not condemn you as you trust in Me and believe My words.*” “*Jesus Christ [my] Lord*” has delivered “*me from this body of death,*” even me, “*Wretched man that I am!*” “*Thanks be to God.*” “*There is ... now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set [us] free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death*” (Rom. 7:24-25; 8:1-2).

This must surely be our attitude as we come to church to kneel before our God. We come before Him admitting our sinfulness, but hearing at once the forgiveness of sins won for us by Christ and bestowed upon us by His sent one. Thus set free, we are bold to approach even His altar as those who have been gathered ourselves into Christ’s net and into His Church, kept there as we partake of His Word and Holy Sacraments.

Peter heard one more word from Jesus: “*from now on you will be catching men.*” Peter here was made a disciple of Jesus and was called into service. Leave

your nets behind and get ready to cast the net of God’s word. Get ready to draw men into the holy Ark of Christendom.

And we? As Jesus’ disciples, who hear His word of Gospel, we are not called to leave behind our livelihood, but we are sent from this place with the net of God’s word, sent to cast the net in the places we frequent. Don’t you be afraid, either. The Spirit will use that net to enclose and draw unto Christ and into His Church yet more of those whom He has chosen for salvation.

God grant that we may ever hear God’s word, and respond in faith, saying “*at Your word, Lord,*” and then seeking to do according to that word.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.