

It Will Prevail

Luke 5:1-11

The Fifth Sunday after Trinity, July 21, 2019

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

The apostolic calling is not your calling. Our Lord called Peter, James, and John to be apostles. Their calling is not your calling.

When Jesus called you to your calling you did not leave your livelihoods and follow Him. Peter, James, and John left everything to do with their livelihoods and followed Him.

When Jesus called you He did not perform a miracle. When Jesus called me it was just Pastor Kubow telling elderly people at Saint Matthew Lutheran Church in Nortonville, Kansas, "Hey that John Sharp guy would make a really fine pastor." Pastor Kubow did not give me a miraculous catch of fish. I have never caught a fish in my life. Pastor Kubow did not perform any other sign or miracle. When Jesus called Peter, James, and John, He gave them a catch of fish that almost sank two boats. It was such a surprising catch of fish after a night of failure that Peter fell at the Lord's knees and said, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." While you enter into your callings as sinful people like Peter did and you kneel before the Lord for your forgiveness, there is still nevertheless no miracle outside the Sacrament of the Altar, and even there your Lord tells you that you are forgiven. He does not tell you there what your calling is. He does that elsewhere.

That means that when our Lord tells the apostles that they will be catching people, that is their calling, not yours. You may very well wind up catching people for Jesus when you fulfill your vocations. In fact my pastoral experience has been that when you fulfill your vocations you catch more people for Jesus than you do when you try to be apostles. So don't believe the evangelism programs who quote to you Luke, chapter five, and tell you that this is about you and you need to get out there the way the apostles did and catch people for Jesus. No. God is content that you always be ready to give an answer to those who ask you about the hope that is in you. And if no one asks you, then you do not have to worry that you have not done enough for Jesus that day. But if you have sinned against the calling that Jesus has given you, if you have sinned against being a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker, then kneel before Jesus and beg His forgiveness because if you sin against those callings impenitently no amount of evangelism programming or effort is going to catch anyone for Jesus.

Jesus did not give the great commission to you. Jesus did not give the great commission to His Church. Jesus gave the great commission to His apostles. And since the Bible does not call the great commission the great commission I do not think that we should either. If you want to call it anything, call it the apostolic commission. Don't believe everything that the editors of your Bible put in there.

The apostolic commission goes like this: Jesus meets His apostles in Galilee and gives them these instructions, "Therefore go, and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them everything that I have commanded for you. And I am with you until the completion of the age."

So the apostles do this. They baptize. They teach. They catch people for Jesus. And they are dead. And that would seem to be a problem. How can the apostles carry on their apostolic calling until the end of time if they are dead.

It is easy more or less. They left us the Bible.

The Bible.

I know that many of you think that you can go directly to God without an intermediary. I suppose that when you pray you are going directly to God without an intermediary. But when God speaks to you, He always uses an intermediary. Barring a vision of the Lord Jesus Christ and so many visions have been of the devil and not of Christ, the Lord Jesus Christ speaks to you through intermediaries. He speaks to you through His apostles.

When you are alone and you read the Bible by yourself and no one else is around, it is an apostle preaching to you. When you read Matthew, Matthew is preaching to you. He is telling you about Jesus. When you read Mark, Peter is preaching to you. The fathers tell us that Mark took his Gospel from Peter. Peter is telling you about Jesus. When you read Luke you are reading all of the apostles because Luke's Gospel is a compilation of all of the apostolic preaching because Luke consulted with all of the eye witnesses of Jesus and His resurrection. When you read John or the book of Revelation John is preaching to you. When you read Romans or Galatians Paul is preaching to you. The apostles are telling you about Jesus. The way the Lord has set things up we would have no knowledge of our Lord and our salvation if it were not for the apostles. Through the Holy Scriptures they continue to baptize and to teach the nations that the nations may become the disciples of Jesus and have the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Has the calling of Jesus therefore failed? The reason that I ask is because it would appear that the Bible has failed.

In spite of its western civilization best seller status the Bible appears to have little influence over our country. Laws are enacted contrary to its principles. People preach against it. There are competing religions that do not use the Bible as their authority and those religions are on the rise in our country. Fewer and fewer people read it. Even among those members of our congregation there are precious few of you who make a habit of reading it often. People act more and more wickedly and contrary to its principles. The Bible seems to many to be a backward book, a book that came from a simpler and more superstitious time. Many do not believe in its metanarrative. They do not believe that the world was made in six days and will end when Jesus returns again in glory to judge the living and the dead. Because many do not believe that they are not taking advantage of the Word and the sacraments which forgive them of their sins and prepare them for the final judgment. People are quitting church. They believe in evolution and the gods of physics, chemistry, and biology. They say to physics, chemistry, and biology, "These are your gods, O humanity, who brought you forth from the nothingness and made you." Even people who profess to believe the Bible go out and lead lives that reveal that they have never read it and if they have read it they are not heeding it. They use false science to dismiss the Bible's claims.

And those of you who do read the Bible despair and worry. You despair and worry because you do not believe the Bible either even though you accept its presuppositions.

Do not be afraid. The Bible was written by the apostles and the apostles will be catching men. The Lord of life filled two boats to the sinking point to prove it.

We love Acts, chapter two. We really do love Acts, chapter two.

In Acts chapter two the Holy Spirit descends upon the disciples. There is the likeness of tongues of fire on their heads. There is the sound of the blowing wind. Peter preaches one rousing sermon and three thousand people are baptized in one day. We love Acts chapter two.

We love Acts chapter two because we are hoping that will happen in our congregation. We are hoping that one of these days we will get a dynamic and rousing preacher in here who will preach so that our congregation will grow! We want to see the numbers. We want people to believe in Jesus. We want people to be saved. We love Acts, chapter two.

But there are other chapters in the book of Acts. Paul and Silas go to Philippi. There is no synagogue in Philippi. They go to the riverbank to see if there is a place of prayer. There is and they preach to the women who are gathered. Out of that apostolic preaching they gain one convert and her family. Lydia and her household are baptized.

Then Paul and Silas wind up in prison for their trouble. They are in shackles in the prison. They are singing hymns. In the middle of the night there is an earthquake. The doors of the prison come open. The shackles fall off of all of the prisoners. That is the weirdest earthquake. I would expect an earthquake to bring the prison down on the prisoners and kill them all. This earthquake mysteriously opens the prison doors and sets the prisoners free from their shackles. When the Philippian jailor sees that the doors are open, thinking that the prisoners have escaped and that his life will be forfeit, draws a sword to kill himself, but Paul calls out to him, "Do not harm yourself. We are all here." The jailor calls for lights and he runs in to Paul and Silas and falls before their feet and asks, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" It must have been some pretty good hymns that Paul and Silas were singing to get him to ask a question like that! They told him, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household." And the jailor took them to his home, bound up their wounds, and then he and his household were baptized.

And that's it! Paul and Silas preached the Gospel in Philippi. Paul is just as much an apostle as Peter is. God even performs the miracle of the earthquake for Paul and Silas and how many converts do they get? Two households. If the households were large, maybe fifty people. Hardly three thousand. And in Athens it is even worse. In Athens Paul only gets a few people who believe in Jesus.

Sometimes the apostles are successful. Sometimes the apostles are not. But the apostles always prevailed. Miracles were performed. The dead were raised. The sick were healed. The prisoners were released. The sinners were forgiven. The apostles prevailed. And in spite of the fact that three thousand people were baptized in a single day Paul is responsible for a greater portion of the New Testament and Paul is the one who established Christian communities throughout the entire eastern Mediterranean basin which then handed down the Gospel through the generations to us. So in spite of his repeated and apparent failures Paul got the gospel to us. He has captured us in keeping with the Lord's promise that the apostles would catch people.

Thus the Bible will prevail. You can disregard it if you wish. You can ignore it if you wish. You can ignore its message and those who preach it if you wish. But it will prevail. And for those of you who believe the Bible and treasure it and read it all the time and yet fear for its lack of influence in the world around us, the one who stood in the midst of boats that were sinking because of the catch of fish bids you, "Don't be afraid." The apostles will be catching men. They have captured you. They will capture others. Their message because it is My message will prevail.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.