

TEXT: Mark 1:14-15

THEME: THE FISHERMAN HAS CAUGHT US

1. Caught by the Good News

2. Caught for the Kingdom

Dear Christian Friends,

The fishermen hurl their nets into the water. Again and again the nets go out to catch whatever is in the sea. This is how fishermen have lived throughout the ages.

We have some wonderful fishermen and women here at Trinity. My family and I have enjoyed it when some have shared their catch with us. We don't normally use fishing nets in our area. About the closest we come to that is dipping for smelt, I suppose. But of course we do use landing nets. I'm reminded of a time some friends and I were fishing in the Boundary Waters in northern Minnesota. My friend and I were in my canoe when he hooked a huge northern. He fought it for a long time and finally was able to get it alongside the canoe. I got the landing net on it but more than half of the fish didn't fit. So he brought it around again, I got the frame of the landing net under its belly, and flopped it into the bottom of the canoe. Immediately I came face-to-face with a huge mouth and very sharp teeth!

Jesus may never have cast a net into the Sea of Galilee. He had probably been trained as a carpenter by his earthly step-father, Joseph. Nevertheless, Jesus is a master fisherman or, more precisely, a master fisher of men and women. After all, he caught you and me.

His net is not a mesh of wool threads knotted together. His net, as Mark puts it, is the good news of God. Jesus casts his net by proclaiming the good news of God. That's what he did in Galilee after John the Baptist was put into prison.

Jesus still proclaims that good news to you and me today. His net brings us life, but there was a time in our lives when we didn't realize how wonderful it was.

We were spawned in the dark, cold depths of sin. As creatures of the dark, we hated the light. Our blood ran cold with no true love for God. Before the good news could catch us, God's law had to crush us. But when God's net of

the law came down, we fled in terror, hiding in dark crevices. We did not want the light to expose our dark hearts.

Yet God had mercy on us. As a net keeps a fish from squirming away, the net of God's law kept us from squirming back into our sinful self-righteousness. The severity of the law brought us pain and death. We realized that the soul that sins—each one of us—will die.

Jesus makes it clear that the law demands perfection. Perfection extends to attitudes of the heart. He says, **“I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment” (Matthew 5:22)**. Anything short of sincere obedience from the heart brings death and hell. **“I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees...you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20)**.

As we sink down into death and despair, caught and killed by the law, his net lifts us up. His good news proclaims to us, “I, Jesus, have fulfilled the law for you. I have taken your death sentence in your place. My blood brings you life!”

And once we have been caught by the good news, our life takes on a new purpose. Jesus catches us with the good news of what he has done for us and the result is that we are **CAUGHT FOR THE KINGDOM**, caught to live and serve and work with Jesus in his kingdom of grace and glory. That is awesome, great, wonderful! Yet, you may be thinking, “My life isn't so awesome, great, or wonderful. Pastor, I think you need a dose of reality.” And I do know what you mean.

Standing beside an infant's grave; sitting at the hospital bed of an 18-year-old in chronic pain; watching your mother lose herself to Alzheimer's—sometimes life seems to be a pointless struggle. As salmon do, we fight the currents of life, swimming upstream over rocks and rapids only to die in the end. Is life nothing but a deathward slide from birth?

Hear the words of your Savior: **“The time has come. ...The kingdom of God is near.”**

Your life is no longer a lonely battle against pointless adversities. Jesus is your King. He rescued you from the powers of darkness and has brought you safely into his kingdom of light. He ransomed you with his blood and has

redeemed you to **“be his own, and live under him in his kingdom”** (Luther’s Small Catechism, Second Article).

He is near you, present in his Word and sacrament, present with the grace of his forgiveness, present with the assurance that you are among his elect, present with his promises of a future glory in heaven. Through these he speaks to you. Hear your King: “You are no longer an alien or foreigner. You have been reborn through the water and the Word, reborn as a citizen in my kingdom.”

He strengthens you to maneuver the rapids of life: **“Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10)**. He comforts you as life’s currents batter you: **“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you” (Isaiah 43:2)**.

His mercy and might will not fail you. He humbled himself to that God-forsaken death for you. But the Father raised him from the dead, crowned him with many crowns, and seated him at his right hand. Someday, as a citizen of his kingdom now, you will reign with him in heaven.

As citizens of God’s kingdom here on earth, we still have troubles and loss as others have. Following Jesus brings the cross. As Christians, we suffer for being Christians. We may face ridicule for not joining in gossiping or cursing our carousing. Friends may distance themselves if we seem “too religious,” especially if in love we point out their sins. Others may take advantage of our Christian kindness, having no interest whatsoever in our message of salvation, viewing us only as their personal ATM to meet their earthly wants. We’re tempted to blend in with the world. We don’t want to be caught “Tebowing!” What’s more, following Jesus goes against our sinful desires. When Jesus leads us away from sin, that sin looks all the more enticing. “Why can’t I have that fun?” our flesh asks.

But no matter how difficult the burden, keep following Jesus. Listen to his voice. He calls to you, **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28)**. Whatever your trouble, Jesus is your help. Whatever your temptation, Jesus is greater. He himself suffered temptation and overcame it for you. He carries your cross with you. Hear his voice in his Word and Sacrament and follow him. Amen.

Prayer of the Church

Our thanks and praise to you, Lord Jesus, for catching us with the net of your good news. Now we ask you to grant us the courage, strength, and wisdom to cast your gospel net far and wide with our offerings and testimony, so that many more will be brought into your kingdom of grace and glory.

Loving God, in your goodness, you have given us the gift of life. On this Sanctity of Life day, we ask your pardon and forgiveness for our own failures and the failure of all people in this world to protect and respect this gift of life—our time of grace—you have given us. We pray that, with your grace, we and all people will respect, reverence, and protect all life and that we will be especially sensitive to the life of the unborn, the abused, the neglected, the disabled, and the elderly. Guide all who make decisions about life, that they will do so with wisdom, love, and courage.

(Special intercessions)

In Your name—Father, Source of all life; Son, Savior of our lives; and Spirit, Sanctifier of our lives—we pray. Amen.