

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Man's best efforts fall short. The men were raised fisherman. But their strong arms and all their expertise could not fill their nets. Of and by themselves, they could do nothing. Their best efforts yielded only empty nets, and worse than that, the nets were dirty from use and had to be washed. After a full night's work, they were going home without food to sustain them or their families.

What the disciples could not do, Jesus did with a Word. Their works availed nothing, His Word surpassed their understanding. At the Lord's command, the hopelessness of sore backs and empty nets gave way to the greatest catch of fish they'd ever seen. Had they remained in Galilee, they would have been famous.

But the men did not haul the bounty back to town to feed their families and sell at market. They forsook that miraculous catch. And they left their boats, their livelihoods. Because the miraculous catch was never about the fish. It was always about the God who commands the wind and the sea, the God who speaks and it is, the God who filled the heavens and the earth and the seas, the God Man who stood before them.

So the miraculous catch was abandoned. The disciples forsook all, even the results of the miracle, and followed Jesus. The real fishing took place when Jesus taught the multitudes from the boat. His Word is Truth. He commands the wind and waves. He alone spreads out the heavens, and treads on the waves of the sea. The fisherman never knows whether the sea will yield up its bounty, or the sea will take his life. But God's Word is sure. At His Word, the men returned to the sea, and cast out their nets in faith. So Peter answered "At Thy Word I will let down the net."

So we must fall on our knees with Peter, and confess "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" For the God that placed the sun and moon and stars, the God that gathered the waters and filled them, the God that said "Let there be" and there was, is holy. He is Light and Love, and in Him there is no darkness. Uncleaness and sin can not exist before Him.

God puts to death transgressors. Consider Pharoah and his unbelieving armies. The Red Sea floor is littered with those who sinned. And defenseless Israel plundered mighty Egypt before they fled, at the Lord's command. They left with full nets. Consider Jonah, for those who do not walk in the way that God has commanded, He surrounds with floods, and His waves pass over them. Those who break His Commands fill the belly of Sheol.

God has articulated His will perfectly in the Ten Commandments. He has commanded that His people be holy, for He is Holy. And yet it is not holiness that marks man, but rather sin. Consider you own lives. Have you loved God above all things? Or have your days been filled with the pursuit of mammon? Has God and His Word filled your thoughts and heart every moment of every day? Or have you forsaken Him by neglecting

the daily study of His Word? Have you forsaken Him by faltering prayers, doubts, anxieties and uncertainty? Repent.

God is not a God of uncertainty. He speaks and it is. His Word is sure. Your works fall short. Your best nets and strong back and fastest boat and lifetime of experience are still not enough to catch even a minnow of righteousness. Before God your best works return only empty, dirty nets.

And yet, in His great mercy, you are the miraculous catch. Yes, greater than the miracle of the full nets is your conversion from death to life. For you are among those men caught by the Apostolic Word. The fish were left on shore with the boats, but the Apostolic Word, the inspired Word of salvation, was cast into the dark, sinful waters of mankind, and you were drawn out. The Gospel preached brings you in as a net does fish.

Fish die when caught – but the Gospel net brings men out of death and into life eternal. You were drawn from the waters of the font alive, reborn, forgiven, and into the Ark of the Holy catholic and Apostolic Church. In Christ Jesus, all your sins are forgiven. And although the catch is great, the Net of the Gospel never breaks – men are saved by believing until the Church is complete.

The Christ was drowned in the darkness of that sixth hour for you. He cried out to the Lord because of His affliction, but He did not answer Him. He was cast out of the sight of the Father, cast into the pit, the agony of separation from God. The proud and deceitful nets of the godless and the unbeliever caught Him and dragged Him into death. But He defeated death. He took up His life again. He rose from the dark depths of that stone tomb to Light and Life, that you be declared holy by faith in Him. To you He speaks the Word of comfort “Fear not.”

He bids the sinner not to flee God, but to run to Him. So you who fall on your knees and pray “Lord have mercy” receive that mercy – poured across your lips and placed in your mouth, as the Christ who died and rose for you feeds you of Himself. His mercies are new every morning, indeed this morning as you hear His Word and receive His saving gifts. For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open to your prayers. Through the Lord’s mercies you are not consumed, because His compassions fail not.

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