

## Recognizing Riches

E5-19, Feb. 10, 2019  
Lk 5:1-11

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You don't work, you don't eat.  
It's that simple.

When I was growing up, half of our family's food came from the garden.  
Growing up in a small town my parents worked three full-time jobs to make ends meet,  
and still half of what we lived on came from what we grew ourselves.

If we didn't plant and weed and water,  
we didn't eat.

If we didn't bother to pick and pack and store for winter,  
we would go hungry.

Simple as that.

You don't work, you don't eat.

But some things were beyond our control.

Sometimes we worked and we did not grow enough.

Sometimes the weather was too cold to grow much.

Sometimes the rains did not come.

Sometimes beetles would eat before we got to.

Sometimes you work and work and still things don't work out.

But even so, even working so much and gardens failing,  
*we always had enough to eat, sometimes scarce but always enough.*

That's the way it was with Peter and his partners.

Sometimes you work and work—for nothing.

Morning came and they gave up.

Too tired to continue and dawn approaching,

they were washing nets,

stomachs grumbling,

wondering what they will tell the children when there is nothing for breakfast.

All night hauling nets, pulling ropes, rowing further, sweating and slipping,  
working until weary,

all to catch *nothing*.

But this is not just about 3 guys fishing for a living.

Watching from the shore are their families, their children,

watching from the shore are their neighbors dependent on the fish,

watching from the shore is the town whose main source of food was fish.

So when they came in exhausted, hungry, frustrated, helpless,

the whole town saw and the whole town was hungry, frustrated, helpless.

If they don't catch fish, their *children* will not eat—and *they* will die.

If they don't catch fish, their aging parents at home will starve—and *they* will die.

If they don't catch fish, their neighbors who trade with them will starve—and *they* will die.

Work and work for *nothing*.

Give your heart and soul to the church,

faithful every Sunday,

take on tasks when asked,

do your part in supporting the church,

give your money,

give precious hours you could have spent with the family,

and then someone *criticizes*.

Work and work for *nothing*.

Then *Jesus* of all people comes along.

Crowds push in on him, wanting to be close.

He speaks of hope, of good news, of release to captives, of liberation from oppressors.

Then he demonstrates the good news by casting out demons and curing diseases.  
 So, the crowds certainly did “press in on him,”  
     so much so that they nearly pushed him into the lake.  
 He got into Simon’s boat and pushed off a bit so all the crowd on the shore could hear.  
 The sermon ended and he asked Simon to do a little more fishing.

It is at this point that we all face a crisis of faith.  
 It is at the point God calls us to trust in tangible, material ways  
     that we face a crisis of faith.  
 Exhausted, tired, giving all you can,  
     conscientiously calculating your income for the year,  
     estimating expenses, trying to save a little for the unexpected,  
     and then God asks you to give more.  
 It is at that moment you enter a faith crisis.  
 This God we confess we believe in,  
     this God we love hearing so kind and welcoming,  
     this God we turn to in prayer,  
 this God asks us to take one extra step,  
     to step out and test our faith and see if this God is for real,  
     see if this God will really come through.

Exhausted, Simon wants to go home and get some sleep.  
 You work and work until you just want to go home, and then someone asks a favor.  
 “Master, we have worked all night long.  
     There are no fish. We caught nothing.  
 [sigh] If you say so, I will let down the nets.”

When you look at Lake Nokomis Lutheran Church and the challenges facing us,  
     do you see problems without answers,  
     do you see budget shortfalls, endless repairs, dwindling numbers?  
 Or when you look at this church do you *see Jesus*?  
     Do you see the Holy Spirit of Jesus doing something miraculous here?  
 Do you see the Spirit of Jesus  
     loving and nurturing and teaching children about God’s delight in them,  
     caring and visiting our friends who cannot come to worship,  
     comforting those mourning loved ones or enduring breaking relationships?  
 Do you see the Spirit of Jesus  
     welcoming without prejudice all who need God,  
     seeking to make right the brokenness of our communities,  
     insisting on justice, respect, security?

*When they had done this,*  
     *they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break...*  
 Simon and his partners were so exhausted from a long night’s fishing  
     and now so much they barely could pull!  
 Just dump the fish and go home and sleep.  
 But the town was watching,  
     neighbors were watching, hungry children were watching.  
 The riches that come into our lives,  
     the wealth that many of us achieve and earn and save,  
     really belongs to the community.  
 Jesus generously gives so that all the town can eat.  
 God generously blesses so that all our neighbors can enjoy.  
 Lake Nokomis Lutheran Church is generously blessed by God,  
     has abundance right here among our members,  
     like Simon, is pulling in loaded nets.

But do you see just the extra work?  
 Do you see just one day of success and then it's over?  
 Do you see a one-time high never to be repeated?  
 Or do you see abundance?  
 Do you see Jesus generously giving?  
 Do you see the riches and blessings and promise of this church?  
 It's a faith issue.  
 It's a crisis of faith.

Simon broke down and declared his faith.  
 He cried he is not worthy of such goodness,  
 that he cannot carryout such blessing.  
 And then another crisis of faith is called upon.  
 Wildly successful, finally, at fishing,  
 with Jesus by your side you can do anything,  
 feeding a whole village at one draw,  
 Jesus tells Simon, *this success is not your future.*  
 When he *finally* gets a break,  
 when *finally* things are beginning to look up,  
 when *finally* he gets back on his feet,  
 Jesus tells him to leave it all behind,  
 Jesus calls him to a different future.  
*Jesus gives them a calling in God's mission.*

*Churches* also have callings.  
 Every congregation assembled and inspired by the Holy Spirit  
 has a unique place and purpose in God's plans.  
 The community around us,  
 the social environment in which we are placed,  
 the demographic changes and evolving needs and personal life changes  
 all shape the particular calling of a congregation in a particular time.  
 God's calling for a congregation,  
 is to join what God the Holy Spirit is *already* doing  
 among the people and neighborhoods around us.  
 Knowing what to do and what direction to go,  
 knowing what our vision for the future is to be  
 is not a matter of deciding what *we want* to do,  
 but a matter of listening to what *God* asks us to do.

The problem is that God *asks too much.*  
 The problem is that what God asks us to do  
 is greater than what we see in our pledge totals and committee recruitment.  
 What God asks of us is *more* than what is humanly possible.  
 Well, of course!  
 If we could do it on our own, we don't need God!  
 If all we shoot for is the mediocrity of what we can accomplish by ourselves,  
 then we don't need faith.  
 We don't need God.  
 But a calling does not have the luxury of individualism or self-sufficiency.  
 A calling is to join what *God* is doing,  
 casting nets on hopeless waters.  
 We are part of something *greater* than ourselves  
 and part of something *bigger* than this congregation of nice people,  
 part of something only God can do.

It comes down to simple logic.

God is bent on redeeming and reconciling this world.

God has set out to restore and heal,  
to make things right,  
to create anew, bless, nurture and thrive.

God cannot fail.

It's a simple fact.  
God *cannot*, by God's nature, fail.

Jesus asked Peter to "put out into the deep water" for a catch of fish.

Peter already tried.  
Peter and his partners toiled all night long.  
Jesus asks the impossible.  
The fish simply are not there,  
it's the wrong time of day  
and it's a waste of time trying.

But God cannot fail.

God is calling Lake Nokomis Lutheran Church into a blessed future.

God is calling this church to be a force of reclaiming, renewing, reconciling.

God is calling Lake Nokomis Lutheran Church to an impossible venture.

It is at *that point* we need God.

It is at *that point*  
we either fish or cut bait,  
we either cast the nets or walk away,  
we either trust God  
or fall back to what we know works.

What does Jesus say next?

"Do not be afraid."

It is what the angel said to Zechariah.

It is what the angel said to Mary.

It is what the angel said to shepherds.

It is what Jesus said to Peter.

It is what God is saying to us at Lake Nokomis.

Do not be afraid.

Trust what Jesus asks.

And be prepared for abundant surprises!

Amen.