

Dear friends in our Savior,

Have you ever seen a miracle? A miracle is an event that is attributed to divine intervention. The only explanation for what happened had to be the divine stepping in. Perhaps a miracle might be a sudden retreat of an incurable, terminal illness that had taken over the body. When the doctors checked on it, it was suddenly gone with no reasonable explanation. We might call that a miracle. Or a loved one saved from serious injury or death in an accident where it appeared from a human perspective that no one should have or even could have escaped. The only explanation is a miracle—God stepped in because of his mercy and grace to save them.

What would you say if I told you that I am looking at a miracle—actually 30 or 100 or so miracles? You being here at God's house today is a miracle and nothing short of that. It's not the preaching that brought you here. It's not the music, not the fellowship of the people here, nor the school that brought you here. God may have used these things to work through, but it is nothing short of a miracle that God worked in you that brings you here today to listen to God's Word. It is a miracle that God alone can work in our hearts that leads us to believe in him as our Lord and Savior from sin, to be eager to gather as a family of believers around God's word and sacrament to bring our worship and praise before him with a complete desire to serve him as his people. This is not something that I can bring about in you. That's not something that a parent or a spouse can work inside of you. Only God, working through his word, can bring about this faith and its actions in your lives.

This is the power and grace of God that we find in his call to follow him. Today, we want to take some time to study this miracle of God that we might better treasure and appreciate the power of God's word and his grace in calling us not only to believe, but to be his disciples and spokespeople in our world today. ***It's A Miracle.***

**Mark 1:14-20** *After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. <sup>15</sup> "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" <sup>16</sup> As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup> "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." <sup>18</sup> At once they left their nets and followed him. <sup>19</sup> When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. <sup>20</sup> Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.*

As Luke records this account, he shares some additional details with us. Before calling Simon and Andrew to be fishers of men, Jesus had them put out in their boats to cast down their nets. Though Simon thought better because of a poor catch the night before, he did as Jesus told him. When they cast down the nets, they had a catch so large that it began to sink their boat. They had to call for help from another boat just to get the large catch to shore. Some might think this was the biggest miracle of the day. But what happened after they got back to shore took that prize. That's where our text picks up the story. The biggest catch of the day and the greatest miracle that occurred that day was not the fish in the nets, but the catch of men made by Jesus not only to follow him but to be his disciples.

These fishermen were hardly the type of men that we would have thought of to come to faith in Jesus, much less be his disciples. They were men of the sea. No doubt you know all the generalizations and stereotypes of sailors. There's a reason there are generalizations and stereotypes—they are true for many and we have no reason to believe that it was different for these men. Fishermen are salty in their language (where do you think that came from?), rough and gruff and probably not much to look at. They probably spoke fairly poorly, didn't have proper grammar and wouldn't have been very eloquent. They probably stunk working hard at sea with fish all day, every day. Remember the cleaning facilities then aren't what they are today. These were very low class, blue collar men. They wouldn't have been the first people that you would try to evangelize, much less call as men who would be disciples—and these men who would be leaders of the disciples. You might have even looked at them and said, "There is no way a person like that would believe, much less follow Jesus as a disciple." Even more, these men had every reason to be upset with God. They had been John's disciples, who was now sitting in Herod's prison for preaching the good news about Jesus as the Messiah. They could have been very bitter that the Messiah would let this happen to their teacher. They could have despaired that if they followed Jesus, the same thing would happen to them.

Yet look at the response of these men. Our text tells us "at once." We could also say, "Immediately." Right then and there they left everything they had to follow Jesus. Jesus broke through their cynicism and despair and brought about a response in them. They left their livelihood and dropped their business immediately to follow Jesus. These were not the days of piling up a big savings account to live off of and be able to draw from ATM's as you traveled around. They left it all to follow after Jesus, trusting that Jesus would take care of them. John and James left their

father, Zebedee, still in the boat with the hired men to follow Jesus. You hear no complaints, no questions, no hint of doubt. Even their father didn't complain. They were willing to abandon everything to serve and follow Jesus.

That is a miraculous catch right there! How did that happen? It happened through the power of God in his word. Natural man can't come to know God on his own. Not these fisherman. Not the smartest person in the world. Not the nicest person in the world. No one can come to know God and believe in him by himself. By nature, our immediate reaction is to flee from God. Like fish in the sea, when a net is cast, our natural reaction is to scatter and swim away from the net as fast as we can. We are hostile to God. We don't want to conform to his word or will and by nature we don't even have the ability if we wanted to do so. God in his power broke through that sinful stubborn heart and created faith in us. It is not just God's power that brings people to faith, but his grace that he would cast his net in the first place. Unlike a fisherman, God isn't casting his net to destroy the fish, but to save them; to bring people to faith in Jesus and know the salvation and forgiveness that comes through him alone. This was the entire purpose of Jesus coming to this earth in the first place. That was the message Jesus was preaching: "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news." This is what Jesus wants—that complete change of heart and mind that sees him as the loving God who rescued his people as he is rather than the enemy who condemns those who sin against him.

Understand the miracle that brought you here today. We confess in the third article of the Apostles Creed: "I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and keeps me in the one true Christian faith." Why are you here today? Why is that you are a Christian and believe in Jesus as your Savior? Because the Holy Spirit has called you by the gospel! That is the grace of God. When you were that hideous, inept, enemy of God, he graciously came to you and offered the invitation for you to know and believe in the forgiveness and life brought through Jesus. God broke through your heart of stone to awaken you to faith. That not only displays the power and grace of God in his call, it also gives confidence to you in your faith. You aren't here today because someone coerced you. You aren't a believer because someone tricked or deceived you. You aren't a believer because your parents forced you or that's all you've ever known. You believe in Jesus and are here today to worship him because God graciously and with power called you through the gospel to repent of your sins and believe the good news! Your faith isn't a crutch for weak minded people. It isn't because you aren't smart enough to be as enlightened as others. You believe and follow Jesus because God the Holy Spirit worked in your heart through the Word and Sacrament. You are here because of the miracle that God graciously and powerfully worked in you!

As you treasure and appreciate this miracle that God worked in your heart, notice the entirety of his call. It isn't a call simply to follow after him as a puppy dog trails after its owner. It is a call to be fishers of men. It is a call to action. God calls you now to participate in this miracle. God worked this miracle in your heart so that he can now work through you to work this miracle in the hearts of more people. That's the second miracle we see today—that not only can God miraculously bring us to faith, but that he can work through us to work faith in others. You might say—using our fishing analogies today—that God's fishing expedition is a "catch and release" expedition. When God miraculously caught you and brought you to faith, he didn't just throw you into his cooler to wait until he was done catching all the fish. When God caught you, he then released you to go share this gracious and powerful good news with others.

Yes, God can use you to be a willing participant in this fishing expedition. He used these fishermen in our text. What power of God that he could work through these frail and seemingly inept men to accomplish his work. This man Simon, who would later be called Peter, is the one who preached the sermon on Pentecost through which God brought more than 3,000 people to faith. What a miracle of God that he can work through men to cast the net of his word and catch people to save them eternally! For these men, this was the beginning for a three year internship. They went through three years of on the job training where they could learn from Jesus and hone their skills and abilities to be the spokesmen of God who would continue his work after Jesus left this earth. During these three years, Scripture shows us they fully didn't understand everything. Throughout the Gospels, we see these very disciples have moments of brilliance and moments of ignorance. They showed moments of great faith and boldness and moments of sinfulness and weakness. Yet they answered the call to follow Jesus and be his spokesmen in the world.

Today, Jesus still wants to share with all mankind his glory, his resurrection, his home, and his life. So he calls disciples—you and me—to carry this message to the world. He is still calling disciples who will cast the net of his word for him regardless of the cost. We have the chance to be part of a miracle—not of our working, but of God working through his word that we are privileged to share. Perhaps you know of someone right now of whom you would say, "It would take a miracle for that person to believe." You are exactly right! And God calls you to be the person who casts the net of his word to that person. What a wonderful call from God! What a great privilege for us to be fishers of men!

As we treasure and appreciate the miracle through which God in his grace and power brought us to faith, may we answer his call to be participants in that same miracle as others are brought to faith as well. ***It's A Miracle.*** Amen.