

St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)
Trinity 5 – June 30, 2024
Luke 5:1-11 – Martyrdom of Peter and Paul
Rev Peter Wagner

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Yesterday, June 29, was the feast of the martyrdom of Saint Peter and Saint Paul. So it's appropriate that today's gospel records the calling of Saint Peter, and then in the epistle Saint Paul declares the whole theme of all his preaching: We preach Christ crucified.

Both apostles, Peter and Paul, both died as martyrs, faithful witnesses to Christ. So we meditate today on their calling.

First, the calling of Peter. In Luke 5, we heard of the miraculous catch of fish by the lake of Gennesaret. When Peter obeyed his Lord's word to put out into deep water and let down his nets, they caught so many fish that their nets were breaking and the boats began to sink.

And when they came to shore, Simon Peter fell at Jesus' knees, confessing his sin, overwhelmed to recognize Jesus as the holy God. But Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." And when they brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

Peter went on to boldly confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. And later, Jesus sent him into all the world with the other apostles, to catch men for the kingdom and build his church on the rock foundation of the confession of Christ.

Among the other apostles was Paul. Paul once breathed out murder against the Christians, until the risen Lord appeared to him in blinding light on the road to Damascus. So he became a mighty preacher of the faith he once tried to destroy. He boldly proclaimed the gospel, that nothing we do can earn God's mercy. Salvation is God's free gift to all, received by faith alone in Jesus Christ, apart from works. And none of this can be discerned by human reason, as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians, "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

So Peter and Paul both took up their crosses to follow Christ to the ends of the earth, preaching Christ crucified. They made no effort to soften the gospel, or make it more appealing to the masses. They refused to compromise their doctrine for the sake of getting more people in the door. So their preaching was considered folly at best, offensive at worst. They were hated and persecuted and suffered as martyrs. According to ancient tradition, Peter asked to be crucified upside down in the year AD 64, saying he was unworthy to suffer in the same way as his Lord. And Paul was beheaded three years later, because as a Roman citizen he could not be crucified.

May God give us faith to follow Christ like them, and grace to die like them, whether in time of peace or persecution, fearlessly bearing witness to the crucified and risen Lord.

"Do not be afraid," said Jesus to Peter. "Do not be afraid, even though you are a sinful man, to stand in my holy presence. And do not be afraid to testify of my name, even before kings, and suffer for my name's sake." "Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven."

Have no fear anything in this world, for what can man do to you? They can do nothing, and neither can death or hell. For Satan's power is gone. When Jesus went to the cross, he set the bait and laid the nets for the devil. In his greed, Satan couldn't resist the chance to kill the Son of God, and so he was ensnared. By his death, our Lord redeemed the world.

So God also uses all his saints, as bait for the gospel. Satan eagerly sends us sickness and suffering, he was glad to put Paul and Peter to death. But God uses our suffering for his good purpose, to bear witness to Christ and bring him glory. Though you are a sinful man, God is pleased to use sinners like you to win victories for the gospel.

Though you are a sinful man, the blood of Jesus has paid for your sin. You need not fear God's wrath, or Satan's treachery, or the world's hatred. Do not be afraid, for your Lord has cast his net into the deep waters of this evil world, to draw you out of Satan's clutches, to rescue you from eternal death. Jesus sends out his fishers of men, his ministers of the gospel into all the world for you, to bring you out of this evil world into the church, the ark of Christendom.

So do not be afraid. Do not fear when the numbers of fish coming into the boat are not as many as you

want. Do not fear even if it seems like the church's nets are breaking and the boat is sinking. Fear not, because Christ is here in the church. He's here in the boat, steering it where it should go to catch abundant fish, just as he told Peter where and when to let down the nets.

Do not be afraid, for you have been called to die with Christ, that you may also live with him.

Because if you think about it, catching fish means putting them to death. When a fisherman catches fish and brings them into the boat, out of the water, they suffocate and die.

And when Christ catches you, saving you out of this world, he saves you by putting you to death. Baptism now saves you, but it saves you by drowning your old sinful nature, along with all sins and evil desires. Baptism brings you into the church, through water, into the boat, where you must die. As Saint Paul preached, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

So when Christ sends out his servants, his fishers of men, to catch you, he sends them to put your old sinful nature to death. And here in the boat, the task of the fisherman, is to prepare you to die. To teach you a life of daily drowning, dying to sin, rising daily to new of life. The struggle was not ended when you became a Christian. You must daily keep confessing your sin and killing the Old Adam and being forgiven in the blood of Jesus, every day until you die.

That is why we preach Christ crucified. We preach about death, the death of God for you, to put death to death in you. As Saint Peter preached, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness." This is the Christian life: Die with Christ, that you might live in him. Look to Jesus who died for you. Take up your cross daily and follow him, overcoming Satan in Christ Jesus.

My task as a pastor is to strengthen you to die confidently, in faith, baptized and forgiven, bearing witness to the crucified Christ. You may not receive the honor of dying as a martyr. But you can pray that your life and death would bring glory to God. Pray that you die without fear, trusting in Jesus and his mercy, so those around you witness the power of God in Christ Jesus.

This week, on Monday, I had the privilege of bringing communion for the last time to our dear sister Ida Fahrman. I sat with her that evening, and prayed over her the prayer for the commendation of the dying. "Ida, go in peace. May God the Father, who created you, may God the Son, who redeemed and saved you with His blood, may God the Holy Spirit, who sanctified you in the water of Holy Baptism, receive you into the company of saints and angels to await the resurrection and live in the light of His glory forevermore."

Then I spoke the Nunc Dimittis, "Lord, now You let Your servant go in peace," and blessed her with the benediction. A few hours later, she departed to be with her Savior. She died in faith, bearing witness to her Lord.

That last prayer over a dying Christian is a remembrance of baptism, of the precious water and word of Jesus, which brought us out of the waters of this evil world, into the safety of the church, keeping us safe in the forgiveness and blood of Jesus all our life.

Such a prayer teaches us how to die. Prepare to meet your Maker by confessing your sin, like Peter before his Lord. Yet also believe and receive the cleansing blood of Jesus, and listen to his word, "Do not be afraid." Baptized and forgiven, receiving the word of Jesus and his precious blood, death holds no terror for you.

So may God the Father, who created you, may God the Son, who redeemed and saved you with His blood, and may God the Holy Spirit, who sanctified you in the water of Holy Baptism, strengthen you to follow him with Peter and Paul and all the saints, bearing him witness every day of your life. And when at last you die, may he receive you into the company of saints and angels, to await the resurrection and live in the light of His glory forevermore. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.