

We begin with a question. Why would Simon and the other fishermen with him be washing their nets? The washing of nets was routinely done after a catch of fish. But these men were out all night and caught nothing. Not one solitary fish. Why, therefore, go to the trouble of cleaning their nets?

We might reply: "Well, their nets might be filthy from being dragged through algae, muck, and sludge." And if so, the scene before us is becoming clear. Simon and his partners are stripped for work, they are filthy, their garments drenched, they stink, and they are tired. We could also add: frustrated. As he tells Jesus, "*We toiled all night and took nothing!*"

And I've been there; haven't you? I'm not talking about trying to catch a bass or a bluegill. I'm speaking of putting our time, our toil, our tears into something, or better yet, into someone, and all we pull out of the waters is algae, muck, and sludge.

Now Simon might have been thinking after working all night with nothing to show for it: "Wow! I must be a really bad fisherman!" And isn't it easy for us to say to ourselves at times: "Wow! I must be a bad parent, or a bad pastor, or a bad (fill in the blank), because, like Simon, I have nothing to show for all my effort."

Jesus doesn't go there. He doesn't add to Simon's frustrations. He gives him two words. A word of command and a word of promise. "*Put out into the deep and let down your nets.*" This is Jesus' word of command. This is really all Simon needs. "Do it. Just do it because I say so." But Jesus is not going to have Simon go back out with his nets simply because He commands it of him. He attaches to His word of command, a promise: "*for a catch.*" "*Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.*" This is promise. This is guaranteed results. It's not: "Go back out there and fail some more." Rather: "Go back out into the deep because this time you will catch fish."

Now, we can understand Simon Peter's response. "Just so You know, Jesus, we were out there all night long. If there were fish out there, wouldn't we have caught at least one? But, at Your word, I will go out again." Yet, which word is Simon responding to: Jesus' word of command, or His word of promise?

I think, with us, we so easily tune out the word of promise and hear only God's word of command. "Go to church," God tells us. "Again? But I was just there last week!" "Just do it. Go to church."

Our sinful flesh reacts negatively to God's word of command so that we can miss hearing His promise attached. "*For a catch.*" "Go to church and you will catch every wonderful gift that I place in the waters of the Divine Service for you."

How about this one. "*Honor your father and your mother.*" Our sinful nature reacts negatively to this command from God. Yet to this word of command is attached His promise: "*And it will go well with you.*"

Or this one. *“Train up a child in the way he should go.”* And here is the promised catch of fish. *“When he is old, he will not depart from it.”*

We're told what to do all day long by parents, spouses, teachers, bosses, the government. We get so many words of command, and from so many, that we become weary and frustrated in our fishing.

Our text this morning, therefore, is encouraging. Perhaps Simon went out again only because Jesus told him to do it. Perhaps Simon missed hearing the word of promise. But that promise was there nonetheless. He caught so many fish that with two boats they nearly sank under the weight.

You have many words of command in your life. What you need is Jesus' word of promise. And it's yours. Therefore, my friends, start washing your nets. The night has ended. A new dawn is here. This is Sunday. A new day, a new week. Go to your baptism and wash away the muck and sludge of the past. Jesus gives you His promise that your toil, your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Now just so we're clear. He does not promise that you will catch any one specific fish that you have your eye on. You're not tossing out a fishing line with a lure on the end of it. You have a net. It's the Gospel of Jesus Christ into which you are washed in your baptism; in which you stand as His Christian. And as you live in this grace of God, trusting it, applying it to others, using it as the net with which you fish, God promises to bless your toil and your tears. You will bring with you to heaven a bountiful catch of fish.

And as for you. Are you and I bad fishermen because we have so many fish that get away? We're sinful. We don't do anything perfectly. There is failure in everything we do. But not with God. And so, my friends, kneel down before Him this day, weary and frustrated though you may be, covered with algae, muck, and sludge. Kneel down, confess your sinfulness. But then look to the tree on Calvary. See all your muck and sludge covering Jesus. He takes it all from you. And He washes you clean with His blood. He forgives you. No demands here. Only promise. He forgives all your sins. And He does everything perfectly.

He gives you a net. The same net He used to bring you to Himself. You have His word of command to let out your net. But do it because of His promise that your labor will not be in vain. Amen.