

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

These seasoned fisherman had toiled all night. They made their living by their abilities on that lake. They had already brought the best of their knowledge, experience, and skill to bear. But even the most skilled farmer can't make it rain. Sometimes the world's greatest fishermen get skunked. When Our Lord said, "**Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch,**" he might as well have said, "**Spit in the water and run up the hill.**" It just didn't make sense. That wasn't the way to catch fish. They wouldn't be in the deep in that part of the day. But even if they were, the water was too deep to effectively catch fish with a net.

St. Peter shows his doubt, he says, "**We've toiled all night and caught nothing,**" means "**This won't work. We know how to fish. This is a waste of time.**" Doing as the Lord commanded would cost Peter. The nets would have to be cleaned and folded again.

But along with his doubt, Peter has faith. He says, "**At Your Word I will let down the net.**" He may not expect it to work, but he will do it. He will do as the Lord commands though it seems wasteful and foolish.

So it is with following the Word of the Lord to this very day. *What good will it do to forgive those who sin against you?* The wisdom of the world is seize the day, take every advantage. Mercy is weakness. Letting go of grudges, turning the other cheek, is like letting down your nets in the deep when toiling all night has already failed. *What about charity?* The world's wisdom is that wealth is a measure of success, it should be accumulated and used for personal luxury. The question of our age is: "**Have you saved enough for retirement?**" not "**Have you provided for the poor?**" Giving money away is like letting down your nets in the

deep when toiling all night has already failed. These things will cost you.

But Peter does it anyway. He does it at the Word of the Lord, because the Lord says so, even though Peter expects it will be a vain effort. It costs him. Not merely will he have to re-clean the nets. It is worst than that. He gets the fish he had longed for all night. It is a miracle, just what he had prayed for. The nets fill with fish. It is more than one boat can handle. They call over a second boat. Then the fish begin to sink both boats. They are going to die. At stake is more than a few hours of extra work or a net or a night's wasted labor. When they get what they thought they wanted, what they longed for all night in their toil: fish, their lives are in danger. They cannot contain the gifts of God. The glory of the Lord threatens to destroy them.

Then Peter sees clearly. He no longer humors this teacher. He no longer makes a nice gesture, doing God a favor by indulging a silly request, giving a memorial to get a plaque on the wall. Now he throws himself at the feet of the Lord. He prays not for fish or wealth or success. He prays for life, for survival. He prays for the Lord to depart, a prayer even more foolish than the ones that went before it. For the Lord's departure would be no better for him than the fish that are sinking his boats.

The Lord does not depart. Instead, He brings Peter and his companions and the fish safely to shore, a miracle equal to the catch itself. Then we see the cost of Peter's following the Word of the Lord. He forsakes all. He leaves the boats, the nets, the men, the prestige, the wealth, and the livelihood. He follows Jesus who did not depart, who remained faithful to him, who showed him the end of worldly things, and promised him a life with God, safe access to the glory of the Lord.

There is wisdom in following the way of the Lord. You have authority and power to forgive the sins committed against you. You can free yourself from the self-absorbed concern of how you have been wronged. You can breath anew and set your mind to

noble things. You can have peace not just with God but also with men, peace inside yourself. You can sleep at night. You can look your children in the eye. You are forgiven and are free to forgive. So, too, you can serve your neighbor in charity. You can give away your goods and find yourself richer because of it. You can spread the Gospel to all the world that men might truly be free. Those are good works. There is wisdom in them. They are good and they are good for you, as good as fish caught in an unexpected way.

But remember how Peter's boat almost sank? Your good works, pleasing as they are to God, cannot save you. No matter how faithfully you let down the nets at the Word of the Lord, no matter how much you expect to be blessed, no matter how strong your faith is, the boat sinks for the reality that you have not been good enough. *What is God worth to you?* Unless you've given it all -- sold your house and car and have nothing but the clothes on your back, emptied your retirement and taken out a loan to give away -- unless you've given everything you have, you have not given enough. Unless you've always turned the other cheek, never grown angry or borne a grudge or remembered some small insult, you've not forgiven enough. The boat sinks because you are not good enough. Even if your faith was not riddled with doubts it could not save you. Faith needs Jesus. Your good works and your faith are good, but their goodness stands in contrast to the evil you have done. The Law exposes and condemns you. If Jesus departs, the boat sinks.

But Jesus does not depart. He does not! He brings you safely to the shore. He is Master of more than simply waves and wind, fishes and loaves. He is the Master over Hell. He has entered into its fiery tomb and taken all it had demanded of you and more. He has paid the price, suffered the defeat, been emptied of Himself to death that He might bring you safely to the shore. He went down to the depths of Lake Genneserat and pulled out the fishermen it had claimed. He will not depart. He loves you to the end. This boat won't sink for He is here in His risen Body and Blood poured into the hearts of His people. He is here with His consoling, forgiving Word and His sacred benediction. His favor is upon you. You are a

sinful man, but He is good and His mercy endures forever. He declares you righteous and He will not depart.

How much then must you give? You can never count the price. The price is too much. *How can you give everything?* It is impossible. But fear not. Jesus does not depart. He will take care of it for you. And here is all you are left to pay: nothing. You don't have to give a thing, not a penny. Let the offering plate pass on by. The Lord has taken care of everything. He has done what you could and would not. He has offered a perfect sacrifice. The kingdom is bestowed on you absolutely free, no strings attached, Jesus loves you. Any works you do are above and beyond. They are not necessary -- because everything has already been taken care of for you. Your boat and your cup run over, but there is no danger. Jesus will not depart. He does not stay because you are good enough, because you let down the nets, or gave a good offering. He stays because He is faithful, He is loving, He is good, and He keeps His promises. He leads by His Word. He feeds you with Himself, His Body and His Blood. And He brings you to the shores of heaven, to Himself, that you would forsake this foolish world, with its fish and wealth and keeping up with the Joneses, and follow Him into life for free. In ✠ Jesus' Name. Amen.