

Advent Advantage

✦ **When nothing goes right... (vv.1-5)**

✦ **When things are too good... (vv.6-11)**

In the name of Jesus, our Lord and Master, dearly redeemed disciples of Jesus:

Often in His ministry our Lord Jesus had to repeat His words and actions. Our text from Luke 5 is a case in point. According to John 1:35-51, Jesus had already called His first disciples, which included Peter and his brother Andrew, as well as the brothers James and John. By the time of our text Jesus was up in Galilee. Here He calls them again, but this time as apostles into full-time service.

Something else you might discover if you did a little digging. This Luke 5 text is appointed as the Gospel lesson for the 5th SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY. In Epiphany we see how Jesus was shining forth in His glory as the Son of God and Savior of the world. Remember that Advent means “coming.” Here Luke records how Jesus was coming as the Christ to teach, preach and call His disciples, but Peter asks Jesus to go away. This is a sad fact in our human condition. We want to examine our own attitudes towards Jesus in this light. That way we can see the **Advent Advantage...**

✦ **When nothing goes right... (vv.1-5)**

Jesus was in a beautiful area on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee where modern resorts and luxury hotels have sprung up. People had streamed to the place to hear Jesus and have Him heal their sick. Imagine them crowding so close that He’s running out of land to stand. So Jesus sees two boats pulled up on shore that happen to belong to brothers Peter and Andrew and their partners James and John. They’re all repairing their nets from the last fishing excursion, preparing for the next. No accident here! Jesus gets into Peter’s boat and asks him to push off a ways from the shore. You know how sound carries over water. Now Jesus can teach the Word of God to the crowd. That’s why He came.

Our gracious Lord also has a lesson He wants to impress on all of His disciples. He knows we get weary and burdened. Sometimes it’s from struggling against this evil world. It may be from trying to be all things to all people when many of the most religious cannot be satisfied no matter what – just like the Jews with John the Baptist and Jesus Himself. Our fatigue may stem from the lack of repentance in our land and country, the humanistic ignorance of the “wise and learned,” or the burdens of trying to keep God’s law by our own works and merits. Whatever the reason, our dear Lord Jesus calls: **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.”** (Matthew 11:28-30)

Peter is so tired. He must have swallowed hard when Jesus asked to borrow his boat for a pulpit. Now he’s busy because last night did not go very well. Can’t you feel for him? **“Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything.”** Notice that Peter’s complaint is about how hard they’ve already worked. So often we Christians are tempted to give up because our efforts seem to do so little good. But giving up lets go of rich blessings God is storing up for us at just the right time. Not for a pot of gold “somewhere over the rainbow,” we are working “while it is day.” We trust the solemn promise that **“God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.”** (Hebrews 6:10) **“So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.”** (Hebrews 10:35f).

So Peter says literally, **“On your word, I will let down the nets.”** This is a good reminder about the proper “object of our faith.” As Christians we do not take a “blind leap of faith” trusting the word of

pastors and theologians. Even a skilled fisherman like Peter was not allowed to trust his senses. Human reason must always serve God's Word, not the other way around. True Christian faith rests on the solid rock of God's Word, our Lord Jesus Christ. What He says will never fail us. And this is what He says, ***"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."*** (Galatians 6:9 NIV84) God's Word cannot crumble beneath our worst challenges and problems. His Word is solid to save our souls for all eternity. It will surely support us in our earthly troubles too. God's Word is our **Advent Advantage – When nothing goes right....** But get this! It's also for times...

✦ **When things are too good... (vv.6-11)**

My first memory of this was talking to a neighbor in the spring of 1987. As I admired the huge boat in his driveway, he started explaining how he got it – as if he were feeling guilty. I assured him it was a blessing from God for which he could be thankful. A few years later a New Life member bought a beautiful new car. She was sounding guilty for the blessing. Haven't we all felt that way?

Peter did. First, the veteran fisherman did the strange thing the traveling teacher told him. If he's like most men, he was shaking his head, quite certain this was not going to work. Then the big surprise! ***"They caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break."*** The original Greek pictures a net full of wildly flopping fish. These were not lazy bottom feeders. They wanted out! Their fish brains were wired for escape. Unable to pull in their nets, Peter and Andrew ***"signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink."*** Suddenly, Peter's whole life went from dark and dismal to blinding blessings. And his heart plunged into guilt at the goodness of God. ***When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.***

Do you really want Jesus to answer all your prayers? Let me rephrase. Do you really want Jesus to do everything you ask in prayer? Here was one time when Jesus answered with a solid, "No way!" He had a much better idea for this overwhelmed fisherman. ***"Don't be afraid."*** That's where the Gospel starts. Jesus takes away our fear by giving us God's full and free forgiveness. God loves to bless. Stop feeling guilty and afraid. Your sins are forgiven, and Jesus has a plan. ***"From now on you will catch men."*** How did the Gospel affect Peter and friends? ***"They pulled their boats up on shore, left everything"*** – including their huge fish fortune, father and career. They followed Jesus instead.

Here's a great lesson for our evangelism callers at New Life. When you've been out "fishing" twice to follow-up on our prospect list, maybe you feel weary and discouraged that more folks have not accepted your sincere invitation to come. Have you "fished all night and caught nothing"? Jesus says, "Keep fishing. Try something else. Fish the deep. Fish the other side." It may seem to make little sense to our nearsighted minds, but the Lord promises to bless His Word. And bless it He will! We fish from one side; He brings in souls from another.

This happened back in the summer of 1993, during our "Vacancy for Evangelism." God led me to return a call, but we pretended I had accepted. During our three-month "vacancy," New Life members staffed the office and took over many of the administrative responsibilities. I pretended I was the vacancy pastor – here on Sundays for Bible Class and worship, but making evangelism calls the rest of the week. One Sunday several women commented, "Pastor, we sure have a lot of new visitors since you've been making those calls." I replied, "You're right, but not from people I've visited. The Lord is blessing our evangelism efforts just as He promised, but He's also making sure we know that He is really doing the work. We fish one side of the boat, and He catches souls on the other."

Thank God for your **Advent Advantage** in Jesus. He is coming **When nothing goes right**. And He keeps coming **When things are too good**. Guilt is gone. Glory is on the way. Praise the God of fearless fisherman. Amen.