God Blesses Faithful Work

Trinity 5 T Luke 5:1-11

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Have you ever been frustrated in trying to accomplish a task, but for some reason or another, your task didn’t get accomplished? Whether it be something at work or at home or at school – for some reason, no matter how hard you try, your work just doesn’t seem to be fruitful? You work so hard, just to have nothing to show for your efforts?

Peter finds himself in that position in the Gospel lesson. He worked all night fishing, yet his work was fruitless. He worked hard all that time to come up with nothing.

Now, there’s a lot more to the Gospel text going on than just Peter’s work life. People drew in to hear Jesus teach. By the end of the Gospel lesson, Jesus called Peter to a different line of work, famously saying, **“Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.”** So, this text is about God calling people to work the spiritual harvest to which He gives growth. But the same can be said in each of our daily vocations too.

So in that sense, there’s an earthly and a spiritual meaning to this text. But both have the same biblical principle behind each – God produces the fruit from our labors.

Peter’s occupation as a fishermen demonstrates the earthliness of this story, and shows how it applies to the occupations we have in our lives. Again, Peter worked with his crew all night fishing. He worked hard to catch fish for his business. But it was to no avail. I’m sure he tried all the tricks he had stashed underneath his sleeve. But nothing worked. His fishing expedition was fruitless. His hard work had nothing to show for it. He and his team caught nothing. No amount of effort could produce the results he needed.

But then Jesus came. He was teaching about the kingdom of God. He used Peter’s boat to go out onto the water. After Jesus taught, he told Peter to engage in His work. **“Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.”** Peter was a bit hesitant since he just struck out. It would be foolish to expect anything different after putting in all that work. But Peter trusted Jesus, and so he let down his nets. When he pulled the nets back up, the nets were COMPLETELY full and were bursting with fish! It was so much, he had to call his friends’ boat over to help, and they both began to sink!

God provided Peter the fruits of his work. It wasn’t Peter that gave fruit to his work, it was God! And the same is true for us in our vocations too. From this, we learn, just as Peter did, that the provisions for our lives through our jobs and vocations, depend not merely on our labor and exertion, but by the Lord’s grace and blessing. Without God’s blessing, Peter never would have been able to gather so many fish. And the same is true for all people in their vocations – our provisions and gains from our labors come not because of us, but because of God. That’s why we pray before dinner and thank Him for our food after our meals. That’s why praying before work is good practice, so that we remember each day that’s it’s God who blesses our work.

As we learn from the first article of the Apostle’s Creed, God is the Maker of heaven and earth. He gives us everything we need to sustain this body and life. He gives us work, our vocations, our jobs, to provide us with money for the things we need, but also, through our jobs, we provide others the things they need. Whether that’s a grocery store worker who stocks food, or a police officer who keeps law and order. Through all jobs and vocations, God uses all of us to provide for the needs of each other. Through His blessing, our work is fruitful.

But as we see from the Gospel lesson, the Lord still approves and encourages the work. Jesus tells Peter to let down his nets, to engage in the work of his vocation. Get a little sweat on the brow. Get the hands dirty! But we trust only in one thing to provide the increase. Not our work, but God’s provisions. We work without the faith and trust in ourselves and our own exertions. We work and trust that God will provide us with what’s needed through the work He’s given us. God wants us to keep the work and leave the care of what’s gained up to Him.

At times, the Lord allows our labors to go in vain. That’s what happened to Peter. God allowed Peter to fish all night to have nothing to show for it. Next time Peter fished, what do you think his expectations were? Probably to receive nothing! But God brought Peter to that point to show that it’s God who blesses our labors and provides the increase, not him. Jesus stepped in and showed him, that it’s God who gives fruits to the labors of men. We trust that God would does that for us too

In that way, we’re saved from the sin of covetousness. Covetousness is the desire to be free of the sweat of the brow, yet to receive the fruits of labor. In avoiding covetousness we trust that God provides. We forfeit the care for how much growth there is from our labors. That saves us from covetousness because we find contentment in what the Lord has given us. We don’t scheme how we’re to get more because we’re dissatisfied with the gifts God has given. Rather, we trust that whatever labors we engage in, the Lord will bless it. And we trust that it’s enough.

This is the earthly meaning as it relates to the daily work of our occupations. But what we draw from this is the same as the spiritual meaning behind the text – God produces the fruit of our work in the spiritual kingdom. Not only in relation to us, but also in relation to others.

Matthew 6:33 says, **“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things –** like what you will eat and what you will drink and what you shall wear - **shall be added to you.”** This is the comfort for you and me. We seek God and His righteousness. He gives us His righteousness in His Son Jesus on the cross. He imputed His righteousness to us, because we have nothing of our own. There’s no godly increase in us spiritually, but only in Christ is there a righteous increase that wells up into salvation. Through Christ, we receive adoption as sons and daughters into God’s family. This is ours in Christ, for this is the reason Christ has come. Since God in heaven is made our Father through Christ, our Father will not let His children go without the needs of this body and life. That’s what preaches in Matthew 6:33, and that’s what He shows to Peter in this text. God provides not only physically for Peter, but He also provides all things necessary for salvation. For Peter dropped his nets and followed Jesus – not only was he caught and brough into God’s kingdom. God now calls him to do the same to others.

Back in June, the LWML convention of the Mid-South was held in Clarksville, Tennessee. The theme verse was 1 Corinthians 3:6, **“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.”** The point here is that it’s not the amount of effort WE put into the kingdom that gives it spiritual growth. Rather, God is the one who increases and grows the kingdom.

A perfect example of this was talked about in last week’s sermon. Jonah preached a 5-word sermon to the Ninevites! His labor was little! Yet, God was able to give growth and increase even through the littlest of labor. He gave repentance to the entire city of Nineveh! This shows more than anything that God gives growth, not us.

So, it is in the kingdom of God. Our labors cannot bring forth anything if God does not provide increase. The labors of my textual study and sermon writing for preparation of Sunday are nothing without the Holy Spirit using this labor to cause increase in others. Whatever we do, we boast not of ourselves and our efforts. All glory belongs to God, for He brings forth the increase, the growth, the fruits to our labor. Now, this doesn’t mean we shy away from work. This doesn’t mean that we shy away from spreading the good news of the Gospel and sort of kick back and relax while we wait for God to provide the harvest. The Lord sees our labor as good, and he sends us to engage in catching men for God’s kingdom, just as He sent Peter to do. But as we work, we always keep in mind – we engage in the labor, and God will grant the increase.

So, as we engage in work – whether it be through our occupations, and living in our families and communities, or whether it’s for the kingdom of God as we spread the Gospel to all people – we trust not in the labors of sinful man to bring heavenly fruits. Rather, we trust in our heavenly Father, who sent His Son Jesus and the Holy Spirit, to bring increase and growth to us and to others.

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