

Wednesday in Laetare
April 6, 2011

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University Lutheran Chapel
Minneapolis, Minnesota

+ Jesu juva +

PARABLES OF LENT - THE DRAGNET

Matthew 13:47-52, Psalm 15

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

In many of His parables, our Lord is careful to explain the kingdom of heaven with pictures His disciples could easily understand. Many of the disciples were fishermen, after all, and were used to dragging their nets through the sea of Galilee to gather in as many fish as they could. The good they kept, the bad they probably threw back. And this, Jesus says, is like the Kingdom of God. The net of the Holy Gospel is dragged through the cold, dark waters of this world and is filled with fish. The fish are taken to shore, which represents the day of judgment and the final rest of the saints, and the good fish, the saints are gathered into baskets, that is unto eternal life, while the bad fish those who only appear to be Christians but in truth are not, are thrown away, that is cast into Hell. And Jesus explains it exactly this way: "So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

The elements of this parable that I'd like us to meditate upon tonight are these: first, the dragnet itself, and then the different kinds of fish that it gathers. So, as I have said, the dragnet is the Gospel. And the one casting the net is God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit all doing their part in this action of sending the Gospel, enacting it, and empowering it, so that we are drawn into fellowship with God. This casting and dragging of the net takes place where ever and when ever the Gospel is preached. It is the activity of the Church and most particularly of her pastors who are charged with this very duty. But it is neither pastor nor church that make the action work. It is the power of God at work through His Word, Christ speaking in it, the Holy Spirit calling, gathering, enlightening, etc.



And here we see the great grace of our God. For the Gospel does not distinguish between people, for all need the forgiveness of sins. The net gathers all kinds of fish, representing all sorts of people. It doesn't matter if they are relatively good or bad, rich or poor, Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or free, to

paraphrase St. Paul. Moreover, the fish do not jump into these nets of their own accord, but are rather caught in the net, contrary to their own desires even; and so the Gospel lays hold of the soul and calls it from death into life: from a life in this cold, dark and deathly world into the light and life of Christ and His kingdom. And this is also the Church on earth, where Christ and His Gospel are found and where those who have been gathered in dwell together with Christ in a heavenly fellowship even while living on earth.

But, as we see from the parable and its explanation, not all of those who are gathered are kept in the end. And why not, if God is so gracious, one might ask? It not for lack of goodness or grace or love in God, but because of the lack of faith in those who reject His love and grace. With the dragnet of the Gospel He gathers as many as possible to Himself. But some of these persistently reject this Gospel. Dwelling among us as the baptized they do not actually trust in Christ, but still remain connected to His church outwardly - perhaps because of family ties, perhaps as a cultural thing, perhaps because they think that going to church will do some good for their children, perhaps even because they think it will make them look more upright to society or bring some kind of economic benefit. But whatever the reason they maintain a Christian identity outwardly, they do not keep faith. Others allow themselves to be dragged away by sinful living. Professing to be in fellowship with Christ, they keep fellowship with the world and the devil instead by indulging in all manner of sinfulness and refusing in the end either to repent or seek forgiveness. And these that are Christians only outwardly are the fish that are thrown away, the wicked whom the angels separate from those who are just that is who have been justified freely by Christ. For what is wickedness or evil at its most basic level but a lack of righteousness and a lack of faith in Christ?

And so we are reminded today of the need to be diligent to maintain and strengthen our faith. "Every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old," Jesus says. And by this He is indicating the importance and blessing of keeping the Word of God diligently and of dwelling in the Faith the Word of God imparts to us. In the New and Old Testaments, as well as in both the Law and the Gospel found in them, we have a treasure that not only has drawn us into the Church, but that can strengthen and confirm us in our faith. For the Holy Spirit, after all, does not quit His work with calling and gathering and enlightening, but also promises to sanctify us and keep us in the true faith. Only by this grace of Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, can we continue in life; for only by God's gift do we have and keep faith. Let us not, then reject this great gift, let us not be dragged to that eternal shore only to find ourselves tossed away into fire in the end; but rather hold firmly to Christ our Savior and to His Gospel, dwelling faithfully in His kingdom now, that on the last day we may be gathered to Him and dwell in it forever. Amen.

+ Soli Deo gloria +