

## John 6:35-51

It's been a little while since I held a fishing pole in my hands. But never have I gone out to fish with a net. There is a big difference, and not just in how many fish are caught. Certainly there is more skill, as well as patience required when using a fishing pole. Using a pole, you need the cooperation of the fish. Unless it goes after your lure, or the worm, you're out of luck. But nets do not work that way. You simply throw out the net and drag in the fish.

So why are we talking about fish today when, clearly, our text is all about bread? Because at the very center of our text, in verse 44, Jesus makes a reference to fishing. "*No one can come to Me,*" He says, "*Unless the Father who sent Me draws him.*" The word *draw* here is, in the Greek, the word that is used to fish, with a net. The fish are drawn in to the boat, or to the shore, by means of a fishing net. There is no lure involved here; no tasty worm. The fish are not asked for their cooperation. The net draws them in whether the fish want to be caught or not...and I think we can safely assume that they do not.

A point here which Jesus makes is that you, dear Christian, were caught with a net and not with a pole. It's the way God fishes for sinners. He did not throw a line out to you with the lure of the Christian religion on the end of it and wait for your cooperation. He caught you by throwing out the net of Holy Baptism and drew you through those waters to Christ.

I'm afraid that modern Christianity has it the other way around. "The more attractive we make our religion," they think, "the more fish we will catch." And so they structure their services in this way with the songs they sing, removing creeds and confessions of sins, dressing the pastor in casual clothing and taking him out of the pulpit; they remove all barriers to Holy Communion so that all who want it, no matter who they are, can have it; they turn people into church members through a short 4-6 week class, if that. They're trying to gain the cooperation of the fish by making the worm as tasty-looking as possible. But this is not how God fishes for sinners.

"*No one can come to Me.*" This statement of Jesus can stand alone, even without the last part of the verse. The bald truth is that sinners cannot, by themselves and by their own power, come to Jesus. Imagine a man going out to fish in a boat, but taking nothing with him by which he might catch the fish. Does he assume that as he trolls through the water, the fish will come up and happily jump into his boat? Even if one does purely by accident, it will keep jumping to get out of his boat and back in the water.

Fish do not come to the fisherman, and neither do sinners come to Jesus. This is the nature of sin. Adam and Eve did not come looking for God after they sinned. They ran from Him. They hid. And even when He came looking for them, they were like fish trying to get away by their pathetic excuses. We're not going to come to Jesus, plain and simple. Our sinful nature prevents it. "*I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him.*" This is what we confess as Christians. Children may run to the ice cream truck when it comes into their neighborhood, but sinners, by nature, flee from God when He comes in His fishing boat.

"*No one can come to Me...*" says Jesus. And yet, here you are. Here you come week after week. Jesus' Table you approach Sunday after Sunday. You are fish whom God has caught. And might I say, whom God catches again and again and draws to Jesus. Because it is so true that we sinners do not like to stay caught. We like our independence. God's ways and commandments cramp our style. We're here in His

fishing boat of the church, but we always seem to be flopping around wanting to evade Jesus' grasp and jump back into our old, sinful ways. And so God has to catch us again and again with His net and draw us back to Jesus; back to the preaching of His Word, back to His Table of Grace.

Fishing is tiring, especially when the fish don't stay caught. A fisherman is going to get tired pretty quickly if he has to keep re-catching the same fish over and over. But God never tires of showing mercy. He loves sinners too much. He loves you too much to shrug His shoulders and say, "Well, too bad; that one got away...maybe I'll have better luck with the next one."

So when God goes out to fish, who does He look for? Who does He draw to Jesus? When a fisherman hauls in his net, he sorts out the good fish from the bad ones. He keeps the good fish, but the bad ones he throws away. "*All that the Father gives Me will come to Me,*" says Jesus. But who are these? The Father doesn't give all sinners to Jesus, for not all are Christians; not all are Jesus' sheep.

If God were to draw sinners to Jesus the way fishermen catch fish, His fishing boat would sit empty. Churches would sit idle. There would be no one to preach and baptize; no one to sing or serve; no one to pass on the Faith to others. We are all bad fish. Were God to keep only the good and the upright, we would all be thrown back to the devil. Those who complain that churches are full of sinners are right. We might look good to the other fish in the water, but we are not good fish. Were God a fisherman like those in the world, not one of us would He draw to Jesus.

But God doesn't fish that way. He drew to Jesus tax collectors and prostitutes -- not those who were hardened in their ways and unrepentant -- those who were bad fish within society, but who were sorry. The Father drew a repentant thief to Jesus as he hung on his cross in the last hours of his life. He drew Zaccheus to Jesus who had stolen much from others. He drew Simon Peter even after Peter denied that he knew who Jesus was. He drew Paul who had purposely jailed and murdered Christians, and made him Jesus' apostle.

There is nothing in your past which can prevent the Father from drawing you to Jesus. It's all forgiven. Your sins cannot keep you away from your Savior. In fact, it's because you are such a bad fish that the Father draws you to Jesus. If you were a good fish, you would not need to be caught and brought to Him who cleanses you of all sin.

"*Whoever comes to Me,*" says Jesus, "*I will never cast out.*" If you leave the fishing boat of Jesus' church, it's not because Jesus threw you out. "*I will never cast out,*" He says, "*whoever comes to Me.*" Sometimes it's a hard thing to show up on a Sunday because we have acted shamefully, and we're not sure that God will accept us. Friend, listen again to what Jesus says: "*Whoever comes to Me, I will never cast out.*" He never looks down upon you. He never looks on you with shame, no matter how you have acted. He took all your shame to His cross and died there for you. You have no shame in God's eyes. You are declared innocent for Jesus' sake. He forgives you. He loves you. He will never cast you out. Your place is with Jesus here in His fishing boat, even if everyone else has turned against you. And since we are all bad fish who are forgiven, how can we ever turn against each other?

You are one whom the Father has drawn to Jesus. Your place is here with your Lord; here at His Table of Grace. And your place, therefore, is with Jesus in heaven. It's all by grace for Jesus' sake. Amen.