

TRY AGAIN

Here is the good news for today from Luke. This is the word of God! A word of great encouragement and hope. Hope is the unique signature of the Christian gospel. What makes a Christian a Christian is their ability to never quit hoping. A new gift from God is at work on our behalf, at all times and in all circumstances.

The crowds had pressed Jesus right up to the edge of the water at the Sea of Galilee to hear the Word of God. There he came upon three defeated men. They had fished all night and had only an empty boat to show for their efforts. They had worked hard but had failed. It was a terrible, horrible, very bad day.

Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, Very Bad Day is a children's book. It's about a little boy for whom nothing goes right. I went to sleep with gum in my mouth and now there's gum in my hair and when I got out of bed this morning I tripped on the skateboard and by mistake I dropped my sweater in the sink while the water was running and I could tell it was going to be a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day. I think I'll move to Australia.

It continues, in the car pool Mrs. Gibson let Becky have a seat by the window. Audrey and Elliot got seats by the window too. I said I was being smushed. I said, if I didn't get a seat by the window, I'm going to be carsick and throw up. No one ever answered. I could tell it was going to be a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day.

And that's just the way it turned out. That night Alexander said, "It has been a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day. My mom says some days are just like that. Even in Australia."

Irwin Shaw wrote a short story called the Eighty-Yard Run. As a college freshman, at his first football practice, he broke loose for an 80- yard touchdown run. His teammates looked at him with awe. His coach said, "You're going to have quite a future around here." His girlfriend awarded him with a kiss after practice. Irwin Shaw had the feeling that life was completely satisfying and rewarding. But nothing in the rest of his life ever measures up to that day again. His football experience is equally disappointing. His marriage sours. The pain of failure is even greater because he remembers thinking of that perfect day many years before when he thought that life would always be that pleasant, satisfying and rewarding.

Life doesn't stand still. There isn't a once-for-all experience. Winston Churchill said, "Success is never final. Failure is never fatal. It is the courage to try that counts." There are going to be bad days. Sometimes we are going to fall on our respective faces. These failures don't have to be the end. They

can be the beginning. The beginning of walking down the avenue to experience God's grace more widely and deeply.

Jesus of Nazareth got into a boat with three defeated men. He sat down and taught the people from that boat. When he had ceased teaching, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." When we put out into the deep water, our lives are often fenced in by self doubt and low expectations. The worst sin we can commit is to aim too low.

We calculate and estimate, and say that this and that will happen, and we forget to make room for God to come as he chooses. We need to expect him to come, but not in any certain way. At any moment he may break in. always be in a state of expectancy, and leave room for God to come into your life as he likes.

Life is anything but predictable! Human nature is not fixed and settled. We live under the umbrella of hope. That hope is found in God, not the situation. At the outset Simon is reluctant—"We toiled all night and took nothing!" the words of a person who has already made the effort and failed. Why should he want to put himself in the position of failing again? How useless this all seemed.

Many times quitting is the easiest thing to do once the challenge has lost its glamour and set into a routine of tedious endurance. But to his credit, Simon was willing to take the risk. "At your word I will let down the nets." To their utter amazement, there was churning in the water as the nets were drawn up, with all those fish flip-flopping in the air and spraying foam everywhere. There was such a catch that they had to signal the men in the other boat to come and help. Then to their astonishment the other boat became loaded with fish, almost to the point of sinking.

No matter how many times a person fails there is always the chance that the next time the attempt will succeed. I can't explain it but I know there are powerful kinds of good that can come into the life of a person who continues to trust, and love, and hold on to that hope that only comes from Christ.

Simon saw beyond the miracle. He realized the holiness of the one in his boat. He gets a glimpse of the power and knowledge of Christ. He falls before Jesus and says, "Depart from me O Lord, for I am a sinful man." Now we come to the real meaning of the story. There's more to life than full nets. You can have full nets and still have an empty life.

Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men." When these men, these hardened fishermen, returned to the shore, they left everything and followed Jesus. You and I

have been put on this earth for a more important purpose than to just fill up our nets. Something more important than all the earthly treasures we can amass.

In Jesus Christ, God loves us more than we can ever mess up. All he wants is for us to return that love. The same power that caused Simon to fall at Jesus' feet lifted him into God's service. What a lesson! Three defeated men moved from empty nets to a full life by the power of Jesus Christ. Jesus does the same for you. Jesus invites you to follow him. When you say yes to that invitation, you, too, will discover how much he has to offer. So today, right now let us become fishers of men. Let us launch our nets into the deep waters and fulfill Jesus' last command. Let us go out into the world spreading his message. If you do that, you'll be amazed at what God will do for you.