

*“After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise shewed he himself. There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore; but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea. And the other disciples came in a little ship: (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes. As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught. Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken. Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples dared ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then comes, and takes bread, and gives them, and fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead.”—  
John 21:1-14.*

**THE PROMISE OF SUCCESS**  
*A Sermon by Theodor Zahn*

EASTER lies behind us. Last Sunday, the day on which so many young Christians in our town strengthened their bond with the crucified and risen Saviour by the confession of their faith, and by receiving His Sacrament, was a fitting conclusion to the succession of great memorial days. Has the old everyday life begun again for us all now, the old as well as the young? In the early days of the Church, when Christians, more than they do now, allowed their outer life to be ordered by the faith and Divine worship of the community, the whole of the time between Easter and Whitsuntide was looked upon as a joyful time, a perpetual Sunday. As on every Sunday, the commemoration day of the Resurrection of Christ, no sign of holy sorrow and abasement of heart was allowed, and no fasting or bending of the knee in prayer, because of the joy in the victory of the Saviour, so it was also during these weeks after Easter. Men wished to retain a little while longer the Easter joy which will last for ever, and which even before it is wholly fulfilled will transfigure all the sorrows of time. It is true that weeks are no more an eternity than a single day. But for us men, who pass our lives in the unceasing change of days that will never return, a day, from morning till evening, is a picture of transitoriness, while a longer succession of days, on which every morning the same frame of mind and train of thought are renewed with the early dawn of day, is a picture of stability in change, of

eternity in fleeting time. Oh that we cherished Easter joy in our hearts as enduring and eternal, and experienced it in our lives! The text for today will do its part in helping us: it tells an Easter story. And there is a second reason which makes it especially suitable for us today.

Festivals are followed by work for everyone. This is especially true of us who are connected with the University, and whose preacher, on account of illness, I have to represent again today. After some weeks of recreation and quiet self-chosen work, public professional work will begin again in a few days. Teachers are making their preparations, and hearers are assembling. Shall we make a new beginning in the work of our calling under the hard law of ancient days: "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth unto thee. . . . In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return to the ground, for out of it wast thou taken"? Or shall we take up the work of our calling again in the joyful light of the glorious day on which the second Adam rose from the heart of the earth? The question for us is, whether we intend to labor like Adam, and those who are only the children of Adam, under the pressure of guilt unatoned, looking back, perchance, longingly to Paradise lost, and looking forward sorrowfully to the grave which must one day receive us and all our labor; or whether we intend to link it on to the great work of Jesus Christ, and then to labor, trusting in the victory which He has won, in the hope that our work in and with His work may also attain the longed-for goal? These two kinds of work are separated as widely as heaven and earth from each other; but both are near to us. We are all the children of Adam, and we are also all Christians. But here in this house Christ calls us to Himself; the Risen Lord calls us in the words of today's text to take up new work. To us too He says: "Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find."

This was no new speech to the seven disciples by the Lake of Gennesaret. More than a year before many of them, in the same place, had once spent a whole night at their trade as fishermen without catching anything, and then at the Master's word had launched out into the deep and had enclosed a great multitude of fishes. And this experience in their lower calling had been used by Jesus Himself as a picture of their future labors in their higher apostolic calling. Now that He is risen, this symbolical action is repeated. The Lord thus appointed the apostles anew to their office and gave them directions for the work of their calling. It was not only by this draught of fishes, but also by many other actions and many other words, that this was done by the Lord during those days; but, surely, never so suggestively, so consolingly, and so encouragingly for all future time.

It was an occasion when but few words were exchanged. But when an act speaks so intelligibly, many words are not needed. A mysterious twilight suffused the whole scene, but it was daybreak. We too pass our lives in twilight, in the twilight between the darkness of this life (which by many is accounted the only true day) and the bright day of eternity. Jesus, the Risen One, comes to meet us too in the twilight, and gives us directions and promises for the work of our calling. Let us therefore listen to Him during this hour and consider with one another the calling of those who acknowledge the Risen Jesus as their Lord. There is, however, a double lesson for us in our text. First: *According to their Lord's command and advice, His disciples always take up their work*

*again. Secondly: The Risen Lord guarantees the success of their work.*

1. On Easter Day the band of the disciples in and around Jerusalem had been led onward from despair to new faith. Then they returned to Galilee, whither the Lord had already directed them before His death and again after His Resurrection. We think of them on their return home as reassured in the depths of their hearts, full of quiet joy, but also full of expectation of all that was yet to come. Where Jesus had first called them to His service and to participation in His work, there they were to see Him again in order to be reinstated in their calling. For this they waited in patience.

When they arrived at their home by the Lake of Gennesaret, not seeing the Lord at once (whose unrivaled words and deeds must have been brought back to their memory at every step), they did not waste their strength in agitating reminiscences of the late overwhelming events and in impatient expectation of new wonders, but they got into their fishing boats to earn their daily bread. Their hands had not forgotten how to handle rudder, sail, and net, and the great thoughts which swelled their breasts did not make them too grand and too proud for their former employment. And because of their humility and tranquility these men were worthy to be called again of God to higher work, to be again made fishers of men by Jesus, that they might carry on their work in larger measure and with much greater results than He Himself had done; no longer now on the shores of the little lake, but on the sea-coasts which unite and separate mankind, and far away over land and sea to the very ends of the earth.

The hour arrived for their re-appointment unexpected and unnoticed. They were intending to land again, after a long and fruitless sail, when a man hails them from the shore and asks them if they have nothing to eat. He remains unknown to them. It is only that they may leave nothing untried that they follow his advice and cast out the net once more on the other side of the boat. It is the speedy and great result which first causes them to recognize the Man whose word they had so often seen followed by great blessings. John first says, "It is the Lord," and Peter cannot wait till the boat, heavily laden with the net, reaches the shore, but casts himself into the sea to meet the Lord. Now no long minute explanation of what had happened was necessary. The Lord, who once in the same place had made them helpers in His work, now gives them commands and advice in the symbolism of their own unconscious actions, as to the way in which they are to take up their work anew, and again and again to take it up even when their work seemed of no avail, and any prospect of results absolutely incredible.

How often in after years the apostles must have remembered this wonderful take of fishes, as they did the earlier one! How often this experience must have inspired and consoled them when they preached to deaf ears and hard hearts, or when they were put into chains and it seemed as though the word of truth had been bound thereby, or when human weakness and perversity appeared among themselves and proved a hindrance to success. Then they could say to themselves: "It is the Lord's command. It is His work which He has commanded us to do. We are weak, but He knew that beforehand. He knows to what weak hands and wavering hearts He has entrusted the most difficult and highest calling—to make the nations of the earth His disciples and citizens of His

kingdom. To us who could not watch with Him in the hour of His fiercest conflict, to us who fled like cowards, yea, even denied Him when He fell into the hands of His enemies, He has nevertheless given the command anew, "Cast out the net." Thus the apostles were spurred on and given no rest and repose in the work of their calling. And this is the meaning of the words at the present day for all who acknowledge the Risen Jesus as their Lord.

Can there be anyone here who has a calling in the exercise of which he cannot say at all times, "It is the Lord's command"? We may be tempted to imagine that our Lord only created one new calling, that He only founded one new office, namely, the office of preaching the Gospel, the calling of the apostles. In that case only we who are theologians, clergymen, missionaries, and religious teachers could feel assured that Christ had given us our work to do, but not the judges and doctors, merchants and artisans, artists and scholars, women and children. Jesus was not the first to call all these professions and vocations into being, and He Himself came into contact with but few of them. For instance, He refused to have anything to do with the office of Judge. Once when Jesus was besought by one who disputed with his brother about his inheritance, to settle the dispute between them, Jesus answered: "Man, who made Me a judge or a divider over you?" But then He said, in accordance with His office: "Beware of covetousness."

It seems too that Jesus gave little heed to politics. When He was asked whether it was right to pay tribute to the foreign pagan emperor, He took no part in the strife of opinions, but in accordance with His office probed the consciences of the questioners by asking them what they owed to the emperor whose protection they enjoyed, and what they owed to God who had called them to eternal life. Jesus, it is true, healed many sick people, but still the calling of a physician was not His but only a representation of His, and He told none to learn the art of healing. He may have used the saw and plane in the house of His parents, but He gave up this trade when He openly appeared in order to become the Teacher and Saviour of His people and of all humanity. From that time He confined Himself to that which He acknowledged as His vocation: the founding of the kingdom of God in the hearts of sinful men by the witness of the truth. The calling of the apostles was just as sharply defined. And yet all Christians are not apostles. Only a very few have a calling which can be represented as a continuation of the calling of the apostles. But it would be a sad and dangerous error for a Christian to imagine that the work of his calling had nothing to do with the Lord Christ, with His command, and with faith in Him; for it does not answer to be a Christian here in church on Sunday and to be a heathen in everyday work. Our Lord is Christ only when He is also the Lord and Master of the work of our calling.

How long have men spoken in the world of a vocation that every one must have? How long has a man who has no calling, or who carries on his work without any vocation for it, been looked upon as an unhappy or despicable man? The heathen of antiquity, the Greeks and Romans of pre-Christian times, did not even know the word "vocation" as we are accustomed to use it, and they had no idea of the fullness of the blessing and duty which is contained in the thought of having a vocation which we must carry out. Vocation has

only been talked of since Jesus came into this world and called to the fishermen on the lake, and the publican in the tolling-booth, and the rich youth who did not know what to do with his life and his riches: "Follow Me, and I will give you work." In every vocation capabilities and gifts are required that none can give to himself. We often call them "talents." But whence comes this word? From nowhere else than the parable of Jesus of the pounds or talents, which the great householder of the world entrusted to his servants that they might trade with them. Since then we have known that it is wrong and does harm to bury our talents, to leave our gifts unused, to neglect our vocation.

All gifts, all tasks come from God, the Almighty Creator and loving Father; and all vocations and offices proceed from Him, and the ordinances and various gradations in life in which men as kings must subject the world to themselves, in order that as priests they may offer again to God all the riches of God-created life. But it was the Son of God who opened again the eyes of us blind men and pointed out the way to wanderers, and the object of all work that is worthy of man. The kingdom of God shall come; God shall be King; the God who is hidden, forsaken, and ridiculed shall reign over a noble generation of men, to whom He has restored their lost liberty, and by them over a world that overflows with His blessing and is full of His glory. The will of God shall reign not only in hearts but in heads, and not only in spirit but in man's outer life, yea, in all that God has created and that has been estranged from Him by sin. And all who have been created by God in His own image are called to work with Him that the kingdom of God may come. The foundation of this work was laid by Jesus Christ Himself. He has done the greater part, for by living and dying He has atoned for the sin of the world which separates us from the love of the Heavenly Father, and which also makes all work on earth slavery and a useless struggle. The greatest and most precious thing in our own lives is, and will remain for all time, the peace that we have with God through our Saviour, that as redeemed and justified we may be certain of the Fatherly love of God in evil as well as in good days.

But the same Lord who has obtained for us such a blessed position as the children of God, calls us also to work, each one to the work of his own calling. One office, as we have already said, He created anew, the office of preaching reconciliation and righteousness; but He did not therefore account any other calling insignificant or to be abrogated. Jesus did not come to destroy but to fulfill. There has never been any lack of forms of work that are well pleasing to God, but Jesus came to give them a living substance. It was the object of His life to accomplish the whole will of His Heavenly Father. Therefore He did not make preachers of all believers, nor fishers of men of all fishermen, while of all the publicans who clave to Him only one was made an apostle. But all who wish to be called His disciples must seek the kingdom of God, and that not only in faith, in prayer, and in the sanctification of their own lives, but also in the work of their calling. There is no kind of honest work which may not serve to the advancement of the kingdom of God.

A Christian must give up all work of which this cannot be said, but all work that a Christian may do because it *may* further the coming of the kingdom of God, *must* also further it, and then it will be holy and good whether it be considered high or low by man. For what then is really great and eternal in the work of man but the love, truth, and

humility in which it is done! The woman who rules the house, the statesman who appears to have all the threads of the government of the world in his hands, the scholar who investigates the most abstruse subjects, the artisans and laborers who provide for the immediate wants of their fellowmen—all these, if they are Christians, are striving after the kingdom of God that Christ preached and founded, and are concerned in the words of their Lord: "Cast out the net."

If you think that you have worked long enough and have accomplished little or nothing, then these words only concern you the more. But perhaps you have not yet really taken to heart those other words of the same Lord, which the apostles also had to learn again on that day: "Without Me ye can do nothing." Make a trial for once with the Lord, for without Him no disciple of the Lord can accomplish anything. Perhaps also you have set about your work according to your own mind and have not followed the counsel of Christ, or you have not sought the kingdom of God but your own profit and honor. Then hitherto your work has not been in any sense the fulfillment of your vocation, and there can have been no promise of blessing. Seek first the kingdom of God in your work, serve the one Lord who tolerates no other beside Him. Cast out the net once more according to His counsel and command, and you will find, and *the Lord, who is risen from the dead, promises you rich results from your work.*

2. The apostles learned this the same morning. A whole night's work without their Lord and no result; a speedy draught at His command and advice, so big that they could scarcely land the fish. Jesus Himself suggests that they should count the fish, and it seems to have been a special miracle that their net did not break in spite of the number and size. But it all came to pass as an example, and was written for our learning. The event in itself also was of very slight importance for the disciples, but all the more important as an illustration. It was a sure promise of rich blessing on the future work of their calling. This story is also for us. The promise still holds good for all who, at Christ's command and on His advice, again and again take up the work of their calling, whether their vocation be that of the apostles by direct preaching of the Gospel to win over men for the kingdom of God, or work in very different provinces and with very different means that God's kingdom may come and God's will be done, and the manifold wisdom of God may be made known upon earth. If we have any calling at all, and if we depend upon Christ when exercising it, Jesus the Risen Lord promises us that we shall have a rich, yea, an amazingly rich blessing therein. When a Christian, who is faithful in his calling, will reap is another question, and one that causes our impatient hearts much anxiety. Only do not let us imagine that all that was promised to the apostles was theirs at once, and that because we see no miracles we ought not to hope for great and speedy results.

Yes, the apostles' draught of fishes was wonderful, and the work which it cost them was not worth speaking of. But how different was it in the reality of which the picture was shown to them in that hour! Then, indeed, they were not constantly amazed by the great results of their work. They were obliged to be very patient over it; and when we review the whole of their life's work, we find they never lived to see the fulfillment of that day's promise. All the nations on earth and all the periods of history are embraced in the work that was set them to do. So they were obliged to fix their eyes in believing hope on the

great day of consummation, when the work of everyone will be made manifest. They passed away in faithful self-denying work, and died before the great net had been drawn to shore. Others in their stead entered into their work, and died also before the coming of the Lord and the great day of harvest.

And all who have worked since then, and those who still work in their calling at Christ's command, must look beyond all the results and failures of time and wait in faith and patience for the day when all work will be ended, and the results of all work will come to light. But the promise that they should reap in joy concerns them all, yea, that they should marvel at the greatness of the harvest and the untold worth of the work they had been permitted to do. A seed-corn cast forth by us may grow to be a blade and bear a hundred grains of corn while we are resting from our labors. If a mother has never done anything else on earth besides imbuing her child with the faintest idea of the nearness, holiness, and love of God, she has worked for eternity. It will be manifested at the last day. If a teacher should seem to have taught fruitlessly for tens of years but has nevertheless given to one single man an impulse to free himself from vain folly and to love and acknowledge the truth, he has worked for eternity. His little service, in the complexity of human life, is an essential contribution to the eternal kingdom of truth.

The Lord who gave us this promise requires indeed of us faith, fidelity, and great patience; but He is also as gentle and loving as He appears in our narrative. He does not let us want [lack] refreshment, which will strengthen our faith on the long journey to our goal. He said to the disciples, "Children, have ye any meat?" It sounded as though He asked them for something for Himself while they had nothing. But when they had taken their great draught of fishes, He was their host and they were His guests. They found their breakfast prepared without any addition of their own, and they had only to add from the fruits of their labors a contribution of that which He in His goodness had lavished on them. This is both a parable and a promise, the truth of which is proved in the life of every Christian who is true to his vocation. From the undeserved goodness of God and as the result of our labors, joys spring up for us which are a refreshing foretaste of the last and eternal joy of the faithful servants of the Lord.

If we ask, lastly, on what grounds a Christian may found [anchor] his faith as to the results of faithful work in his calling, it is now as it was then. Jesus, who is risen from the dead, has promised, and He vouches for the fulfillment. His Resurrection is the great turning-point in the history of human work. Till then the words held good: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken." But now the Son of Man is risen from the grave, and calls on all the children of men who acknowledge Him as their elder Brother to new work, to work which will not end with the grave. If He had remained in the grave, then all the works of man would have fallen under a double curse. They would then, even far more than formerly, have been but a sad way of passing time, a means only of forgetting one's self and one's misery. For who ever worked like the soul of Him who alone is holy and righteous? And He would have attained nothing. The faith of the few whose hearts He had won for an incomparably beautiful object in life would have been destroyed, for all would have been proved to be a deception, and therefore despicable folly. They might perhaps have caught fish for a few

more years, but men never; and their words would not have come down to us. But God be thanked who sent His Son to us, and who, after His Son had worked even unto death, has awakened Him and His work with Him unto new life.

My beloved, it is delightful to keep Easter and to allow our lives to be transfigured by Easter joy. But do not forget one thing: The Risen Lord, who prepares such joy for us, is also the Lord and Master of our work. He calls to us, "Cast out your nets, and ye shall find." And this is what I have wished to point out to you today. But the Apostle Paul has said better than I can all that should be preached to you today. I refer to the last words of his great sermon on the Resurrection, which shall also be the last words of my sermon to you: "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." Amen.