

Sermons at Union Congregational Church

Preached by The Reverend Gail L. Miller, Pastor

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Luke 5:1-11

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Fishing with Jesus: Another Miracle of Abundance

I'm sure you know this already, but fishing is not always easy! The story goes about the man who went on a three-day fishing trip. He caught absolutely nothing - no fish at all and was very frustrated and embarrassed to return home empty-handed.

So he went to the local fish market, and says to the guy behind the counter, "Throw me two of those big salmons, and two of those big tilapias."

So the guy working behind the counter takes the fish, wraps them up and hands them to the fisherman who says "Can you actually throw them to me please? That way, if anyone asks me if I caught any fish on my trip, I can truthfully say, 'I sure did. I caught four big ones!'"

Obviously this man had not been fishing with Jesus. According to our lesson for today, fishing with Jesus requires two things:

- Trust
- Humility

And fishing with Jesus will result in two things:

- Abundance
- New life

Simon Peter and his friends were actually done with their fishing for the night and were cleaning things up and putting their nets away when we begin this story. And having been out all night and having caught nothing I imagine they were tired, frustrated, discouraged - maybe a little annoyed at the commotion nearby on the shore, Jesus teaching the word of God and large crowds moving in to hear what he had to say around him. My guess is that Peter just wanted to go home when Jesus asked him if he could borrow his boat.

And then perhaps Peter is turning to leave the lake and return to his family, when Jesus turns to him and tells him to put out his nets into the deep water. Now from Peter's perspective there is so much wrong with this.

First of all, it's morning - and everyone knows that the best fishing is at night.

Second can't he see that they've just cleaned everything up and put it all away.

Third, clearly the fish weren't biting - they caught nothing all night.

And lastly, what does Jesus know about fishing? He's a carpenter - this is not his trade!

And this is where we see the trust!

Peter had just seen Jesus heal his mother in law in the story right before this one, so Peter knows something of Jesus power and identity. And his trust becomes faith and his faith becomes obedience. "I will let down the nets again - BECAUSE YOU SAY SO."

Sometimes we just need to head out into the deep waters and let down our nets for no better reason than Jesus has asked us to do so.

God calls us to obedience without showing us the end result. We have to trust in him – not usually a comfortable thing to do – to step outside of the familiar.

But sometimes, Christ leads us into seemingly impossible situations. And we shouldn't avoid them, because that's where we'll experience God. If we attempt only things we know are possible with the resources we already have, we'll receive the credit and God will have no part in it.

When Peter goes out fishing with Jesus, we see that the ordinary is never the ordinary when Jesus is around. One last gasp cast of the net brings in a load of fish so huge, the nets are strained and Peter needs help hauling it in as they fill 2 boats 'til they're beginning to sink!

An amazing catch, made in deep water where there should have been no catch; at a time of day when there should have been no catch.

This is definitely NOT the story of the one who got away! Fish stories of often stories of exaggeration – but not here – this time it's true! This isn't a run of good luck; this is what happens when you put your trust in Jesus.

It's like that with him. Jesus did not come simply to make each one of us into some kind of metaphorical fishermen - going out to catch souls with a line of faith so that they could be displayed in some heavenly trophy case.

He came so that each one of us might have an abundant life, a full and rich life, a life in which we know and experience and share the love of God - a love which conquerors the sting of death, and ensures that in the end our labors are not in vain, no matter how many days our nets may come up empty.

To achieve that life - we have to do one thing - we have to recognize that our knowledge and our experience is not equal to that of God's.

What comes up sends Simon to his knees: net-breaking, boat-sinking abundance. In the place where Simon and his fellow fishermen had already been laboring, in the landscape they thought they knew, in the place where they had come up empty: a stunning catch, lavish beyond measure.

Trust begets abundance. And abundance begets – humility. Peter falls down and admits his own sinfulness.

We also need to recognize that God's ways are indeed superior to our own, that His wisdom is greater, His timing better, and His counsel more life-giving than our own.

Sometimes we need to listen to someone who lives outside our frame of reference – another point of view. Sometimes we need to risk one more failure, to go and do what our common sense tells us cannot be done and to try what we know will not work.

Jesus knows what we're getting into. After all, this is God's mission we're on, not our own. And so Jesus assures Peter and us, "Do not be afraid."

Trust – Abundance – Humility – and then new life following Jesus.

Fish weren't the only catch of the day; Simon and his companions were hooked. Captivated. Called. And that's what miracles are meant to do: they meet us at our point of need, but they do not leave us there. They call us to move from being recipients to being participants, to share in the ways that God pours out Himself for the life of the community and the healing of the world.

And I think a clue to this new life is found in the fact that abundance is found in the deep water – when we're in over our heads.

We are changed when we come face to face with the deep waters.

I think Jesus is constantly inviting us into the deep places. I think he doesn't want us to be paddling around in the shallows of life where we often spend so much of our time.

He's calling us to acts of trust and courage, when we want to play it safe. He's calling us to step out in faith and freedom while we cling to our safe and familiar fears and anxieties. He's calling us to think and live deeply, to face our doubts and fears, and abandon ourselves to the depths of God's abundant life.

And when we do – nothing is ever the same again.

A large prosperous downtown church had three mission churches under its care that it had started. On the first Sunday of the New Year all the members of the mission churches came to the city church for a combined Communion service. In those mission churches, which were located in the slums of the city, were some outstanding cases of conversions—thieves, burglars, and so on—but all knelt side by side at the Communion rail.

On one such occasion the pastor saw a former burglar kneeling beside a judge of the Supreme Court of England—the judge who had sent him to jail where he had served seven years. After his release this burglar had been converted and become a Christian worker. Yet, as they knelt there, the judge and the former convict, neither one seemed to be aware of the other.

After the service, the judge was walking home with the pastor and said to the pastor, “Did you notice who was kneeling beside me at the Communion rail this morning?” The pastor replied, “Yes, but I didn't know that you noticed.” The two walked along in silence for a few more moments, and then the judge said, “What a miracle of grace.”

The pastor nodded in agreement. “Yes, what a marvelous miracle of grace.” Then the judge said “But to whom do you refer?” And the pastor said, “Why, to the conversion of that convict.”

The judge said, “But I was not referring to him. I was thinking of myself. You see, it did not cost that burglar much to get converted when he came out of jail. He had nothing but a history of crime behind him, and when he saw Jesus as his Savior he knew there was salvation and hope and joy for him. And he knew how much he needed that help.

But look at me. I was taught from earliest infancy to live as a gentleman; that my word was to be my bond; that I was to say my prayers, go to church, take Communion and so on. I went through Oxford, took my degrees, was called to the bar and eventually became a judge. Pastor, nothing but the grace of God could have caused me to admit that I was a sinner on a level with that

burglar. It took much more grace to forgive me for all my pride and self-deception, to get me to admit that I was no better in the eyes of God than that convict that I had sent to prison.”

Following Jesus leads to only one place – the foot of the cross where the ground is completely level.

God calls us in the middle of our exhaustions and other plans, in spite of our shortcomings, even after our failures. God calls us to risk going deep, even over our heads.

Because in this new life, we don't mend, tend or haul the net; rather by God's grace we become the net. God does the mending, the daily washing and the morning-by-morning encouragement.

It's too soon in the New Year for an Easter story. Still, anytime we're working the night shift with Jesus, we must be prepared for an outbreak of Easter. We witness what it's like to be astounded by a death-defying Jesus, as we move from failure and scarcity to abundant new life.

Amen.