

SERMON: Let Down Your Nets
TEXT: Luke 5:1-11

2-6-22

It may or may not surprise you to learn that I am not a fisherman. Or a fisherwoman or a fisherperson. I don't like to fish. Take me out on the lake in a boat on a beautiful summer day, I'll stay there all day long, perfectly content. But I don't need a fishing pole in my hand. And if I never have to touch a worm or a fish for the rest of my life, I'm okay with that. But I will say that I have imagined myself as a fisherman, especially when I read the story in Luke known as, *The Big Catch*.

Before we go any further, you should also know that I am a cynic. As a Pastor, I probably shouldn't admit it, but I sometimes have a really hard time believing in miracles. And a big fish story like this one? Well, I'm usually going to look for some other miracle, some other detail in the story hidden within that big catch of smelly fish. I'm going to try to read between the lines to find out what else is going on here that reveals an even more miraculous, amazing, and powerful truth about who Jesus was and who we are.

Oh, and one more thing about me. I don't do all-nighters. Okay, maybe once or twice as a teenager at a slumber party. Maybe a couple times in college writing a paper or studying for an exam. Maybe with a sick child or in a crisis call from a church member. I also get pretty cranky if I'm awakened from a deep sleep for something unimportant, or something that can easily wait until morning. As a parent, I failed to show any patience or compassion when my adolescent children would wake me up to tell me they couldn't sleep.

So, this story about professional fishermen who had been out on their boats all night long with no success, and then who hauled in a miraculous load of fish only after Jesus told them to let down their nets once more... well, you might think I would want to avoid this story altogether. Instead, I think I'll dive a little deeper.

Imagine how frustrating it must have been for those fishermen. After a long night on the water with nothing to show for it, to be greeted by this wise guy son of a carpenter insisting that they let down their nets one more time. That's the definition of insanity, you know: Doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. Had I been one of those fishermen, I might have snapped at Jesus in my cranky, sleep-deprived state: "Are you insane?! What do you know about fishing, anyway? If there are any fish in that lake, they are too

smart for us, and not interested in being caught. Just what are you trying to prove, anyway?

On the other hand, Jesus had been saying some very wise things about God. It seemed as though he knew God personally. And there was a lot of talk and excitement in town about the miracles he'd been performing. The fishermen had friends in the crowd who seemed to be quite taken with him. Maybe, somehow, Jesus knew something these fishermen did not know – not about fishing, necessarily, but about life, and faith, and serving God. Maybe he was trying to illustrate that there were greater things than hauling in a big pile of fish.

Jesus told Simon, “Put out into the deep water and **let down your nets** for a catch.” I imagine Simon hesitated, but finally answered with a worn down sigh, “If you say so.” Exhausted and lacking the energy to argue, they complied with his request. “We’re not going to get out of this, so let’s get it over with.”

But this small act of relinquishing control resulted in the biggest catch of fish they had ever seen. Their nets began to break, and their boats nearly sank under the weight. Simon was brought to his knees realizing the miracle he had just witnessed. Where his expertise had failed, the power of God was victorious. In a

way, he was humiliated. Humbled is a better word. He recognized his own unworthiness in the presence of God. With his head bowed in humility, he said, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!”

Perhaps Simon realized at that point, if only for a moment, that it wasn't about him. It wasn't about success. It wasn't even about a big catch of fish.

I remember a 13-year-old girl from another church who summarized this story as a lesson in not giving up. That's pretty insightful for a 13-year-old, and it's not a bad lesson: perseverance. Yet, I also knew a woman who believed that sometimes you need to stop what you're doing, and that's not the same as quitting or giving up. While perseverance is a good thing, there are times when we should stop beating that dead horse, when we should cut our losses, when we should walk away. But when it comes to faith, that's when we should keep on keeping on and never give up. Never give up believing in Jesus. Never give up trusting in God.

It is surprising to me that Simon and the other fishermen didn't even stick around to reap the benefits of their big catch. They didn't wait for all the congratulations and pats on the back from their friends. They didn't wait for the big payoff they would get at the market for this big catch. They didn't even go home to

share the news with their families! Instead, they let go of all that. They *let down their nets*, if you will. “They left everything and followed Jesus.”

That’s what it’s about. When Jesus said LET DOWN YOUR NETS, he was talking about something bigger than just a big catch of fish. Bigger than perseverance. Bigger than prosperity. Bigger than popularity. Even bigger than the people we call family. Following Jesus is bigger. Trusting God is bigger. God’s glory and God’s kingdom are bigger than our own glory, our own goals, our own profit, our own pride, our own life.

Jesus was very clear about what his purpose was for Simon and the other fishermen. He told them, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.”

Every church wants to grow. To add to our numbers. To fill the pews. But this is another area where Jesus might be calling us, LET DOWN YOUR NETS. One of the most important and most memorable things I ever learned in seminary was from a professor of evangelism. “It’s not about success,” he said. “It’s about faithfulness.”

“Sailboat Church,” by Joan Gray, uses sailboats and rowboats as metaphors for church. In rowboat churches, “rowers are confined to the power they can generate themselves.” But in sailboat churches, “sailors learn to let the boundless power of the wind move them where they need to go. Sailors live in the creative tension between our weakness and God’s power, between our poverty and the wealth of resources God provides to those who obediently seek to do God’s will. Living between the realities of ‘without me you can do nothing’ and ‘with God all things are possible’ is both humbling and exciting. We are constantly reminded that we are powerless to do the work of Jesus’ church without him. At the same time, we find that the wind of Christ’s Spirit still blows in the world, and as we put up the sails God does amazing things.”

However, being a sailboat church doesn’t mean that there’s no work to be done. It’s just a different kind of activity than rowing. Gray says, “Sailors put up and shift the sails and partner with the wind to move the boat. In the Sailboat church, God and believers work together as partners. In this partnership what *we* do is important; what *God* does is essential.”

Hmm. LET DOWN YOUR NETS and hoist up your sails. Make room for the Spirit to move in the water and the wind. Let go, and let God.

But remember that Jesus still didn't let the fishermen go take a nap after their miraculous catch of fish. Instead, he invited them into relationship. Into a new way of life. "When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him."

What does it mean for you to LET DOWN YOUR NETS? May we all learn to trust in God and partner with Jesus... to the glory of God!

AMEN.