

Put Out into the Deep

Luke 5:1-11

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The title of today's sermon is "Put Out into the Deep." It is what Jesus said to the fisherfolk prior to the miraculous catch of fish. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let's first look at the story and see what it has to say for us today.

Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, which is also called the Sea of Galilee. And people were pushing on him to hear the word of God, which was the good news of the reign of God (Luke 4:43). And Jesus sees two boats, and the fisherfolk had exited the boats and were washing their nets. Well, I suppose that Jesus hated to see unused boats, so he got into Simon Peter's boat and asked him to take it a little way from the shore and Peter does that, so Jesus sits down in the boat and starts teaching the crowds. He turned the boat into a lectern. Jesus probably projected his Power Point onto the sails, don't you think?

After his lecture was over, it was time to fish, so Jesus said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon rolled his eyes and said, "Master, we've been working our hoofies to the quick all night long, and we didn't catch even a guppy! But at your word, I'll try again!" So Simon texted somebody, "SMH," shaking my head. But surprise! they caught so many fish that the nets were beginning to break! Peter then signaled his buddies in the other boat to come and help. He had to phone a friend! And the fish filled up both boats and they began to sink. And Simon Peter, that rock, who sometimes seemed to have rocks in his head, fell at Jesus' knees. Now, if your boat is sinking, you don't want to fall in it. That will make you sink even faster. But what Peter had to say was important: "Get away from me, Lord, because I'm a sinner man!" Why did he say this? Because of the miraculous catch of fish, did he realize that he was in the presence of a holy person, a representative of the Lord God? Notice how he called Jesus Master first, but then Lord. If he was in the presence of the Lord, then he realized how inadequate he was, how broken, how sinful. Apparently, he was speaking for his partners too because they were all amazed at the catch of fish. Folks at Nazareth were initially amazed at Jesus' gracious words. People in Luke were often amazed. They often sang Paul McCartney's song "Maybe I'm Amazed!"

Peter's amazement is related to fear because Jesus says, "Don't be afraid. Fear not. Don't be skeered!" Whenever angels or Jesus appeared to people in Luke (or elsewhere in the Bible for that matter), they said, "Don't be afraid. Keep calm. Beginning from the right now, you're going to be catching not fish but people!"

Then they brought their boats to shore. But I thought that the boats were sinking. Maybe there's another miracle, that the boats got safely to shore. But Peter and James and John left their fish and their boats and their co-workers; in other words, they left everything EVERYTHING and followed Jesus.

That's quite a story, isn't it? In Matthew and Mark, Jesus simply approaches Peter and Andrew and James and John and says, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people" (Matt 4:19; Mark 1:17). So they leave their nets and their father Zebedee and hired hands to follow Jesus. In the

Gospel of John, the Risen Jesus appears to seven disciples fishing at the Sea of Galilee, and at Jesus' direction, they catch 153 fish, some of which they eat for breakfast (John 20:1-14).

I'm particularly struck with Jesus' telling Simon Peter the fisher that he would be catching people. In the Hebrew prophets, fishing is an image of judgment. Jeremiah says, "I am now sending for many fishermen, says the Lord, and they shall catch them. . . . For my eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from my presence, nor is their iniquity concealed from my sight" (Jer 16:16a, 17). Habukkuk says, "O Lord, you have marked them for judgment, and you, O Rock, have established them for punishment. . . . You have made people like the fish of the sea, like crawling things that have no ruler. The enemy brings all of them up with a hook; he drags them out with his net" (Hab 1:12b, 14). So Jesus is here using a prophetic image. One might say that the disciples will catch people in the net of God's love, in the net of God's kingdom, in the net of God's kin-dom.

How does Peter do in catching people? Remember that Acts is the second volume of Luke's two volume work. In Acts 2, on the day of Pentecost, Peter preached a sermon in which he said that he and the other disciples were witnesses of Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection, and as a result, three thousand people were baptized. So, Peter caught 3000 folks in his Pentecost speech, and then he caught a big one when he reeled in Cornelius, the Roman centurion (Acts 10:1-48).

When Jesus commissioned Peter to catch people, he also commissions us. We write the 29th chapter of Acts and following. How have you been caught in the net of God's love during this bridge period? Perhaps in worship, when we have gathered to hear the word preached, to pray, and to sing praises to God. Perhaps it has been as you have gathered in small groups to discuss a spiritual book or to further the work of the church. Perhaps it has been as you spent time alone in prayer, interceding with God for the church. In those moments maybe you relaxed just a bit, you unclenched your teeth, you loosened your shoulders, you breathed a little easier; you were caught in God's love.

You have caught me in God's love as you have encouraged me in my ministry here. You have pummeled this parson with praise. I needed a ministry assignment such as this. Interim ministry can be challenging, but it also can be a great joy as the church supports the minister and joins with them in carrying out God's work.

I know that you will continue to catch people in the net of God's love under Pastor Jane. As you know, the pastor is not the main fisher of people in the church. No, pastor is the equipper; the people are the fishers. They—I should say--YOU are the ones who catch people in God's love.

And oh, how our world so desperately needs to be caught in the net of God's love. Amidst all the news about pandemic and its attendant woes, I was particularly saddened by news of the death of Cheslie Kryst, the 2019 Miss USA, lawyer, TV correspondent, who this past week committed suicide by jumping to her death at her apartment building in the Hell's Kitchen area of New York City. Her mother said that she had "high-functioning depression," and nobody,

not even her mother, who was her best friend, knew the turmoil that she was going through.¹ Cheslie Kryst's final Instagram post said, "May this day bring you rest and peace."²

We do not know the burdens that people are carrying. We do not know the darkness that people experience. In that case, let us be kind to everyone, whether they need it or not. Let us show love to everyone, whether they need it or not. Let us pummel people with praise whether they need it or not. Let us catch people in the net of God's love, whether they need it or not.

In closing, I would like to quote a giant of the early 20th century Albert Schweitzer. He is best known as a missionary physician in Africa. Before that, though, he was a theologian, and he wrote a ground-breaking book entitled, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. It ends with these haunting words: "He comes to us as one unknown, without a name as of old by the lakeside he came to those who knew him not. He speaks to us the same word: 'Follow thou me,' and sets us to tasks which he has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey him, whether they be wise or simple, he will reveal himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in his fellowship, and as an ineffable mystery they shall learn in their own experience who he is."³

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¹ Lisa Respers France, "Cheslie Kryst's mother says that she hid 'high functioning depression,'" *CNN entertainment*, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/03/entertainment/chelsie-kryst-depression/index.html>

² https://www.instagram.com/p/CZWn2kuOVy_/?hl=en

³ *Chalice hymnal*, p. 89.