

Sermon for February 6, 2022

Shivon Miller

In our gospel reading from the book of Luke we hear Jesus' call to the fishermen,

"Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch."

Simon answers "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing."

In this gospel, this story is placed right before the calling of the disciples.

There is another account of this story in the gospel of John. In the book of John, this story is placed right after Jesus' resurrection. The John account reads:

The disciples went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. At daybreak, Jesus said to them "Children, you have no fish, have you?" And they answered, "No" and he instructs them "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some."

Cast again in deeper waters.

Cast again on the other side of the boat.

Imagine being one of those fishermen. Fishing was their job. They were not new or inexperienced. These were family trades. They had lifetimes on the water. They were dependent on a catch of fish for income and security. At the end of that night, after hours of throwing out and hauling in the nets, exhaustion must have weighed on them. With empty boats, they must have returned to shore disheartened. They wash their nets and secure their boats, resigned to try again another day. Imagine hearing Jesus' words "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets"

We get a sense of Simon Peter's initial hesitation "But Master, we have worked all night long..." We have already tried. We are weary. We have already washed the nets. There are no fish out there. Resigned, they have stopped fishing.

But Simon Peter stretched past his initial words, "Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets."

"Yet if you say so Jesus, I will let down the nets...I will go to deeper waters and try again."

Simon Peter has just sat at the feet of Jesus as he taught the crowds. He has heard enough to respond "Yet if you say so...I will..."

I will cast again in deeper waters.

I will cast again on the other side of the boat.

Today, this text comes to us, amidst a season that feels like a long night of fruitless efforts. We, as individuals and as a church body are weary from a hard night on the churning seas, trying to maintain our livelihood. Congregations across denominations are struggling, pulling up empty membership, finance and mission nets. For many of us the work of being the church is not new; it is a calling passed on to us through family generations. We have spent our lifetimes in these

waters and yet here we stand on the shore wondering where all the fish have gone. Resigned at the lack of results despite all the efforts, the temptation is to wash our nets and go home disheartened.

Jesus speaks “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets...”

We too have had the chance to sit at Jesus’ feet, to hear Jesus’ teaching. And while the first words that escape our lips may be “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing,” may we dare to continue “Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.”

To answer “Yet if you say so...” we must first fully hear Jesus’ words.

Cast again in deeper waters.

Cast again on the other side of the boat.

Jesus does not say “go back to the same spot and keep doing what you were doing.” Jesus calls them deeper. Jesus calls them to a new way, to fish on the opposite side they are used to.

What does it mean for us to “cast in deeper waters?” How are we called to cast in ways opposite to what we are used to?

Deeper waters often carry more risk. Learning new ways takes intentional work.

As we come off the waters this dark night, disheartened, I think Jesus first invites us to sit at his feet and listen to his teachings once again. It is these teachings that bring Simon Peter to take a risk, to do a new thing. It will be Jesus’ words, fresh in our ears, stirring in our hearts that drive our action forward.

When the fishermen dare to do as Jesus says to go deeper, to take further risk, to try new waters, to learn a new way, they are amazed at the results. “they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break.” They experience the abundance of God. The abundance exceeds their expectations and capability. They have to signal partners to come and join in the efforts to keep from sinking under the weight of abundance.

Imagine if we dared to hear and then do as Jesus says – are we ready to be led deeper, to take risk, to enter new waters, to do things a new way? Interestingly Simon Peter’s first response when he sees the results of abundance in the boat is to fall down at Jesus’ knees and claim his sinfulness. Do we start by repenting for being too disheartened and too resigned – too stuck in shallow waters, repeating comfortable patterns, unwilling to take risks and try new ways? Jesus says “Do not be afraid.” From initial call to resurrection and eternal life, Jesus says “Follow me.” Simon Peter leaves everything and follows on an adventure into even deeper waters, with astoundingly new ways and extreme risk. And the catch will be abundant! For here we are generations later– God’s abundant catch being called to continue the casting. Imagine what waters, what abundance, what partners, what fishing awaits!