

## **Let Down Your Nets**

Isaiah 6: 1-8

Luke 5: 1-11

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Will you join me in a moment of prayer?

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

There was a group that called themselves The Fisherfolk Club.

They started out as a gathering of people who earned their living fishing in the ocean.

At first, only real fisherfolk could join.

But not wanting to be selfish, and because they had nice facilities that needed to be paid for, they invited others to come in too.

In the club headquarters there were fish symbols galore, hooks, nets, and floats and rods.

All the members of the club, even those who were not fishers, wore old hats with lures stuck in them and tall wading boots which got quite uncomfortable on warm days.

But they were proud to be fishers and so never took them off.

They had a well-stocked library of books about fishing.

And several times a year they ran seminars to which world-renowned fishers were invited to come and deliver learned lectures.

All the talk and all the activities of the club centered around fishing, but as the years went by, fewer and fewer of the members actually went out fishing.

Then one day, the club had a new member.

They had not had a new member for some time, so this was an interesting experience.

And the new member asked an interesting question. “When do you go fishing?”

Well, it turned out that members of The Fisherfolk Club had never caught a fish.

In fact, they had never actually seen a live fish.

And the idea that they should go out there in a boat or wade into the water came as quite a shock to them.

They had long meetings on the subject and finally came to the conclusion that the new member would have to leave.

The new member obviously knew very little about what it really meant to be a member of The Fisherfolk Club.

This story in various forms has been around for years.

Perhaps since the time of Jesus ☺

But what does it mean?

In a literal sense: Do any of us here make our living from fishing?

Some of us probably have never even been fishing.

But what about the story as a metaphor?

A metaphor for the church.

We just read from Luke’s gospel... the fisherman had been fishing all night and had caught nothing... Jesus asks whether he can use one of the boats to speak from and he taught the crowds from the boat.

And then he said to Simon “Put out into the deep waters and let down your nets.”

Simon grumbled a bit, after all he had been fishing all night and had nothing, and now Jesus wanted him to go into the deep waters?

They were shore fishermen, they didn’t go out into the deep.

But Simon obeyed... and the nets came back overflowing and they were amazed.

And Luke concludes this portion with these words, “When they brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.”

They left everything and followed him...

As I pondered the story this past week, I saw a five part formula in the story:

- The fishermen already had a relationship with Jesus.
- They listened to his teaching.
- They did what he told them.
- They were amazed at the result of their efforts.
- They followed him.

Listen again:

- They had a relationship with Jesus.
- They listened to his teaching.
- They did what he told them – even when it didn’t make sense.
- They were amazed at the result of their efforts.

- They followed him.

How does this story model the Christian life?

What does this story have to say about being a community of faith?

It seems to me that one of the biggest sorrows or laments that this faith community has is loss of membership.

Not a week goes by that I don't hear a lament about the days when the SS was bursting... when the pews were full... when the church was the centre of the community...

And yes, the loss of those things is something to grieve... and as we move through the weeks of Lent, I hope that we can process some of that grief in order to let it go.

But let's explore those five steps in a little more detail.

- They had a relationship with Jesus
  - How many relationships do you have?
  - I have an exercise for you to do at home – take a piece of paper and write down all the people to whom you are connected.
  - Then ask yourself how many of these people have you invited to church?
  - How many people have you told that being part of a faith community is meaningful to you and you willingly share your money, your talents and your time as part of the Body of Christ.
  - Are we prepared to tell others of our relationship with Jesus?
- They listened to his teaching.
  - Because of their prior relationship with Jesus, when he spoke, they listened.
  - Do we listen to Jesus' teachings?
  - Do we hear his message?

- What if our ideas of God, Jesus and scripture were formed 30, 40, 50 years ago, back when we were children?
- Let's not forget that while Jesus welcomed children, he taught adults... adults who most likely had grown up learning the Hebrew scriptures.
- Ongoing study and reflection of the Bible and of our United Church is vital for all of us, not just me.
- Are we prepared to listen to Jesus?
  
- They did what he told them – even when it didn't make sense.
  - Think about it... they were told to let down their nets in a place where they had never fished before...
  - What if we are being called to let down our nets in places where we have never fished before?
  - What if Jesus is telling us that the way we always did things isn't working any more?
  - What if Jesus is telling us to stop working so hard at things that don't work any more and try another way?
  - Are we prepared to do what Jesus tells us?
  
- They were amazed at the result of their efforts.
  - The nets were overflowing... so much so that they needed help from others to bring in the catch.
  - What would overflowing nets look like to us?
  - What would we have caught?
  - Are we prepared to be amazed if we let down our nets in unfamiliar water?
  
- They followed him.
  - The disciples left their boats and their livelihood behind.
  - What do we need to leave behind in order to follow Jesus?
  - What are we willing to let go of in order to reach people in this time and place?
  - Are we prepared to follow Jesus?
  - Follow him into the place of abundant life for all?

One of the other things I have come to realize since I have been your minister is how many of you are tired...

The demands of keeping this church operating can be overwhelming... some of you have been serving faithfully in a role for years, perhaps even decades.

One of our challenges is the number of people we need to fill the various roles and committee memberships.

But what if we are going about it backwards?

What if we looked at the gifts and skills that are evident in this faith community and built our ministry on that?

There are a couple of committees that are mandated by the United Church of Canada, but aside from those, there is very little else that we 'have' to do.

A couple of weeks ago I spoke of how we are all part of the body of Christ and that there are many opportunities to serve.

That same insert is in the bulletin this week and I invite you to prayerfully consider how you might be part of the Body of Christ.

But don't do it out of obligation, do it out of love and excitement for the possibilities.

And if you would like to explore in more depth where your gifts might be, I have a Spirit Given Gifts inventory questionnaire you can do that can help determine that.

And so outside of those mandate committees, if some spaces do not get filled, or if there is not sufficient interest in some roles, that doesn't mean that they are bad ideas, but perhaps ones that are for another time.

They might be ways that worked in the past... they might be ways that are for the future...

What are the ways of following Jesus that are for this time and place?

Are we going to be like the people in the Fisherfolk story?

Never letting down our nets?

Never wading into the deep waters?

Forgetting our purpose?

Or are we going to be like the fisherman in the story from Luke.

Following Jesus?

The choice is ours?

Thanks be to God for that challenge and opportunity.

Thanks be to God for you. Amen.