

January 22, 2012

Ellicott City Parish of The United Methodist Church, Bethany UMC campus

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Sermon: Deep Water

Lesson: Luke 5:1 – 11

Key verse: When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “*Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.*” (Luke 5:1 – 11 – NRSV)

Certainly, the end result of today’s Bible story is one that needs to inform our faith insofar as how we need to respond to God’s call in our lives. Simon, James, and John leave everything and follow Jesus. From this moment on, they embark upon a journey with Jesus, preaching and teaching God’s message of love and forgiveness, baptizing people in the faith, and eventually spreading the good news of Christ throughout the ends of the earth. Certainly, these disciples’ work has brought us here today, this very morning, in this very place.

But there are two other parts of this story that need to inform our thinking in a high definition way about what we might expect if we are to follow Christ in this day and age. Perhaps these two parts of the story informed Simon Peter and his fishing partners. The first of these is what is represented by the deep water in which these fisherman must go to catch so many fish. And I want to acknowledge that, especially with the Italian cruise liner tragedy this past week, thinking about deep water may be a difficult concept to consider. We need to be sensitive to the loved ones of those who lost their lives this week. And yet, with every loss of life that takes place in the world, the stakes of our spreading of the Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the ends of the earth become that much higher, that much more urgent. But in order for us to think about what the deep water in this story represents for us, there is another character besides Jesus, Simon Peter, James, John, and the persons in the crowds we must consider. I offer this character for us to consider so that we can look at this story in a higher definition than we might normally do.

This is the character of the net the fisherman must let down in order to catch the fish. Now, a fishing net in those days was actually three nets in one, and Luke, the author of this story, appropriately refers to the net in the plural as nets. The net they used had three parts. There was the outer net that had holes big enough for the fish to swim through. The second part had holes that the fish could get through by poking their way through. The fish could get inside that with a little more effort on their part. The final part of the fishing net was sort of a net bag. The fish could not pass through that. They could only get out the way they came, but by that time, they couldn’t turn around because there were too many of them and because the fisherman had pulled the outer net too tight for the fish to get out.



If you'll indulge me for a moment, I want you to consider what the net might have been feeling that day that Jesus came upon it. If this net could express its feelings on that day, it would probably have feelings that we may sometimes have. First, the net, if it could express its feelings, most likely felt frustrated in much the same way Simon Peter felt. It worked all night and had not fulfilled its purpose of catching fish. Haven't we felt frustrated from time to time? Haven't we ever worked a full day at the office or doing whatever it is we do and then left for home feeling as though we didn't get enough done? As people in church, have we ever felt that our mission of making disciples for Jesus Christ has just been too hard sometimes? We may wonder if this task is too hard for us.



After being in this water all night, the net must be cleaned if it is going to be used again. Cleaning this kind of net is a painstaking process, wherein fresh soap and water must be procured and each line of the net must be gone over by hand. For the net, it is finally able to rest. Like the net, we too must rest. We need to take time as Christians to re-charge our creative juices, to ask ourselves how we can spread God's love throughout the world.

The net probably wanted to echo Simon Peter's attitude when Jesus essentially said, "I know you're tired, but go try it again. Simon Peter does not seem particularly willing to try out Jesus' idea: *"Master, we have worked hard all night long and have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets."* The net was probably thinking, what does this guy Jesus know about fishing that my owners don't? Don't we ask ourselves stuff like that sometimes? Well, it was pretty easy for Jesus to get people to follow him – after all, he was the Son of God, right? But getting disciples today in 2012?! We have lots of things to contend with – we've got to worry about bills, we've got places to go, football games to watch. Jesus, let us try to catch people after we've had time to rest and get all our other things done first.

Certainly, the net was amazed when all these fish swam into it. After a night of nothing, Jesus somehow used his authority over all Creation to make a point. I am the Lord over all Creation, Jesus demonstrated, even those creatures that swim in the sea. When we consider the beauty of Creation, don't we marvel at the power of nature, of God's handiwork?



And, the net was straining so hard to hold all of those fish, it was beginning to break. This phrase, beginning to break, is probably one that each of us experiences from time to time. It's called burnout, or about to burnout. How many of us serve on a church committee or in some leadership position in the church? Don't you ever feel like the work you do is so hard? We sometimes wonder where the fruits of our labors are. We

work hard, but then Jesus coaxes us to work just a little bit harder. Again, Jesus calls us by name. Again, Jesus says, as he does in verse 4 of today's lesson, "Put out into the deep water!"

Our task, like the fishermen's real task, is not to catch fish. It is, as Christ puts it, to catch people. And before those fishermen leave everything and follow Jesus, Christ decides to give them a reminder of something the fishermen knew very well. You can't catch fish in shallow water – you have to go to the deep water.

Friends, today's Luke story is here to give us a similar lesson. If we are to fulfill our mission of making disciples for Jesus Christ, or growing disciples who experience God and live a Christian life together, we need to immerse ourselves like the nets did, we need to let down our nets, like the fishermen did, in the deep water. The disciples needed to learn that lesson before they started out. And we need to pay attention to the lesson they learned: Fish in the deep water.

So from now on, Jesus tells Simon, James, John, and us, we will be catching people. But before he says that, he says one other thing. Take a look at verse 10, he tells Simon something that my dad told me the first time I jumped off the diving board into the deep part of the swimming pool when I was learning how to swim: "*Do not be afraid.*" Well, when I was learning how to swim, I was afraid, especially of the deep end. But my dad was there and I trusted him. For Simon and the other fisherman, Jesus was there, and they trusted him. We won't be fishing for people alone. We have Jesus to guide us, and we have one another to fish with us. Jesus said, "*Do not be afraid.*"

So what is the deep water for us today? Well, I cannot describe all of it because for each of us, it is different. But I think I can describe what we might find in the deep water. To catch people for Christ, we must encounter our own uncertainty in the deep water. Along with the prospect of spreading the good news, the questions of the deep water confront us: Am I up to the task? Do I have enough faith? Will there really be other Christians willing to help me? Is God really telling ME to support the church in this way? But Jesus said, "*Do not be afraid.*"

Along with the prospect of catching people for Christ, we have to acknowledge the magnitude of the risks of spreading the good news: What will my co-workers, friends, and family think of me? Talking about God in church is okay, but church feels like the shallow water. When I drive out of the parking lot today, what will people think of me if I start telling them that God loves me and them? If people hear me saying stuff, like Jesus is my Lord and Savior and can be yours, too, will they listen or will they avoid me? We might wonder if that risk is worth taking? But Jesus said, "*Do not be afraid.*"

The deep water might call us to go places we would not otherwise go. Am I willing to sacrifice my precious time to help other people? Is engaging in missions really what God is calling me to do? Does working to help others really make a difference in their lives?

To help us answer these questions, I have asked one of our Bethany members to share with us about his work in the deep water of service and missions. His name is Zach Ugol.

*Note: Zach shared his experiences about going to Slidell, LA, with Youth On A Mission (YOAM). There, he joined with other youth to continue clean-up tasked following the devastating hurricane there in 2005. Even now, even though some of the homes have been rebuilt, others remain boarded up as they were 6 years ago.*



*Pictured to the right is a group he was in which he helped to repair the house of a mother and daughter who are seated in the center of the bottom row.*



Friends, we have many examples of people at this church, like Zach, who are fishing for people in the deep water. We have many opportunities for you to work in the deep water. Our bulletin announcements invite you to work in the deep water, our sign-up sheets by the elevator to volunteer with the Cold Weather Shelter invite you to work in the deep water, our work with People Acting Together in Howard County (PATH) invites you to work in the deep water, our newsletter and website list other opportunities as well. Follow Jesus: He is telling us to put out in the deep water. The deep water is where we will find many challenges, but do not be afraid, it is also the place where we will catch people for Christ.



Let us pray...