

## Cast Your Net to the Other Side

By: Meagan McLaughlin

February 6, 2022. As we claim in our baptisms, whether we believe we can do it or not, regardless of how much the very idea may terrify us, we too are called to be fishers of people. In her sermon today, Pastor Meagan talks about what that means for us.

Readings: [Isaiah 6:1-13](#), [1 Corinthians 15:1-11](#), [Luke 5:1-11](#)

\*\*\* Transcript \*\*\*

That day, on the sea, Simon Peter was doing what he always did on any ordinary day. He, along with his shipmates and partners, had been hard at work, trying to make a living and provide for their families, as many of us do. He had no reason to expect, when he got up and said goodbye to his wife and left home, that this day would be any different from any other day. He got into the boat, set out to sea, and cast the nets, hoping to catch enough fish to pay the taxes he would owe the tax collector, with enough left over to cover his family's needs.

All night they fished, casting the nets again, and again, and again, and — nothing. And this was Peter's profession, something he had been doing for all of his adult life. They knew these waters. If anyone should be able to catch fish, it would be Peter and his crew. And still, as happens sometimes: nothing.

Finally they gave up and came back to shore, and as they cleaned up so they could go home after a long, unproductive but quite ordinary night, the first unexpected thing happened. Jesus, looking for a way to preach to the large crowd that had gathered to hear him, came to Simon Peter and asked for a favor.

So out they went, so that Jesus could speak from Peter's boat. And when he was done, Jesus told Simon Peter to head out to deep waters and let his nets out again. And in spite of his weariness, the worry of not bringing anything home to his family, and annoyance at the itinerant preacher who was telling this career fisherman how to do his job, something about Jesus had drawn Peter in. Or perhaps, he just wanted to prove Jesus wrong. "If you say so," he said. And then the second unexpected thing of that otherwise ordinary day happened.

Thank goodness Peter wasn't alone on the water that day. His partners had gone back out with them, and between the two boats they just barely managed to get back to shore, hauling the biggest load of fish they had ever seen. And like Isaiah of the unclean lips, and Paul who had persecuted followers of Jesus, like almost all of the prophets of God, and like so many of us, Simon Peter falls to his knees and says, "Wait a minute, what are you thinking? I can't do this! Go find someone else. You've got the wrong person." Funny thing is, Simon Peter doesn't even know what Jesus is asking him to do yet.

And just like that, Simon Peter's whole life changed. He went out that day to catch fish to provide for his family. He hit a wall, perhaps not for the first time, and they caught absolutely nothing. And just when they had given up for the day being "fishers of fish," Jesus showed up, and Simon Peter became one of his followers, "fishers of people."

As we claim in our baptisms, whether we believe we can do it or not, regardless of how much the very idea may terrify us, we too are called to be fishers of people. What does that even mean? Because it certainly doesn't mean we go around throwing nets over everyone we meet, pulling them into our boat,

and hauling them back to shore.

For one thing, if we are to be fishers of people, we have to step out of our comfort zones. That's part of why this is such a scary thing. Isaiah answers God's call saying, "Here I am. Send me," not knowing where God may send him. Paul, who was raised as a Pharisee and taught to be suspicious of anything that seemed to threaten what he knew, left his comfortable upbringing far behind as he went out to share the good news and promise of God in Jesus.

For Peter, it meant giving this itinerant preacher a lift, and then listening to him when he suggested something that sounded a little crazy. Throwing the net down on the other side of the boat. And in a matter of a few hours, Simon Peter has put down the fishing nets he has used his whole life in order to follow Jesus.

For us as for them, answering Jesus' call to be fishers of people challenges us to leave the solid ground of what is familiar to us, what we have always done, with its steadfastness and predictability and familiarity, and head out to the sometimes chaotic deep waters of trying something new. We, like all those before us, are invited to let go of what we think we know, and trust that God will lead us when we don't know the way.

Being fishers of people opens our hearts to see people we may normally overlook, especially to those who may look, talk, think, and live differently from us, extending the "net" of God's grace and love in unexpected ways, right in our own neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces. We do this within, as we strive to welcome everyone who enters into this space in our sanctuary and our Zoom space, but also outside of this congregation. Jesus tells Simon Peter to set out for deeper waters, and Isaiah says, "Send me," not knowing where he will end up after all.

We learn, as we fish with Jesus, just how wide the net of God's grace is. It is wide enough to catch us when we feel the least prepared or capable. It is strong enough to carry us when we have tried everything we know, and are exhausted and have nothing left. It is deep enough to hold us when we are at our most broken. This is what Peter learns on the boat with Jesus that day. And this perhaps is why, even after catching so many fish they could barely haul them to shore, he was willing to leave his boat and all that he had known to follow this itinerant preacher who showed up, asked for a ride, and then told them to cast their net on the other side.

"Do not be afraid," Jesus tells Simon Peter. Like Simon Peter had his partners to help him with his unexpectedly large catch of fish, we have each other as we follow Jesus. This is something we do together, in community. Jesus does not promise that being a fisher of people will be easy. But Jesus does promise to be with us and guide us when we cast our nets on the other side, no matter what unexpected things may happen along the way.

Thanks be to God.

\*\*\* Keywords \*\*\*

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