

## **Put Out into the Deep Water**

**Pastor John Mars**

**February 6, 2022**

Good morning, Church! Our scripture reading is from Luke, chapter 5, verses 1-11.

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Then he sat down and taught them from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that the nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

May God bless the reading of His Word.

I love a good fish story! Those of you who I've had the privilege of getting to know, in the short time that I've been here, probably are not surprised that my very first memory in life is a fish story. My dad did two tours of duty in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, one of them in the early 60's and one of them in the late 60's. Gitmo, as we used to call it. This occurred in our first tour there. I was somewhere around three years of age. Interestingly enough, both times we lived in Cuba we lived in the same duplex in the same apartment. It backed up to Gitmo Bay and there was about 50 yards from our back gate down to the bay itself. There was a little clearing there where there was a little pier out where we docked our boat. On each side there were mangroves. And our second tour there when I was a little bit older, I spent every waking hour, it seemed like, either in the mangroves or down on that pier fishing. But this happened in the first tour. I was about three years old. I was sitting in my dad's lap. He had taken a long pole and tied a length of line on it and put a small hook and a little piece of lead on it. And I caught a fish! And I did with the fish what three-year-old boys do with fish. I played with him. And what I was doing is, I had that pole and I was leading him across the top of the water. I'd lead him back this way and I'd lead him back that way. And I was watching him swim when all of a sudden a big predatory fish called a jack crevalle came up and, just like a depth charge, went out from under my fish. And I instinctively jerked as hard as I possibly could, I think with the help of my dad, and the fish's head came out of the water and he went nuts, just soaked my dad and I, broke the line and took off. I turned to my dad and I said, "Dad, I got a bite!"

Our passage today is a great fish story. So great was this fish story that it completely changed the direction of the lives of four commercial fishermen. They saw in that story

the hand of God working a miracle. Here's what happened. Early in Jesus' ministry we see him most often teaching the Word of God in synagogues. At this point he's still teaching in synagogues some, but the synagogues were slowly closing to him. The crowds became so large that synagogues could not accommodate them. The orthodox Jews did not tolerate him. And we find Jesus most often in these days teaching and preaching on the roadside, on the mountainside and on the lakeside. On this particular occasion he is out by the lake, the Sea of Gennesaret, also known as the Sea of Tiberius, and most often called the Sea of Galilee. He's teaching the people, and people are crowding around him, and he spies two boats on the lake shore. He knows the fisherman. He has a relationship with Peter and Andrew and James and John. He knows them. They know him. He spies these boats. The fishermen are cleaning their nets, washing their nets. Luke says the fishermen were washing their nets. It seems like a very innocent, innocuous detail that doesn't mean anything. But for that day, in that time, this was extremely important. You see, the nets were made out of plant fibers. The plant fibers actually attracted algae and other debris. In order not to be extremely obvious to the fish, they had to clean them meticulously. Not only did they have to clean them, they had to stretch them out to let them dry or they would shrink. The implication is that Peter and Andrew and James and John had washed their nets, stretched their nets, dried their nets and put their nets back in the boat, waiting for the next day of fishing. Another little detail, because the nets are made out of plant fibers, they are very visible during the day. So, no self-respecting fisherman would fish with those nets during the day. It was always done at night. Jesus spies one of these boats belonging to Simon. He said, "Simon, would you just cast out just a little way from the bank so I could talk to people?" It was a perfect platform to preach; a little bit away from the people where everyone could see him, everyone could hear him, and he wasn't crowded around by folks. After Jesus finishes his speaking, he says, "Peter, launch out into the deep water and let down the net for a catch." When you get home, look at that passage. Jesus doesn't say, "Hey, Pete, let's go out and see if we can get a fish," or "Let's go try to catch a fish." He says, "Go out in the deep. Let down your net for a catch." Now, had I been Peter... Remember that Peter had fished all night long and caught nothing. He's already washed, dried, stretched, folded and put up his nets for the next day. I would have said, "Jesus, you stick to carpentry. Let me do the fishing." Because, you see, night is the time you fish, not during the middle of the day. But Peter's response to Jesus is, "Lord, we have fished all night long, hard, and caught nothing. But because you say so, because **you** say so, here we go." And they caught so many fish that the net began to break. They signaled their partners, James and John, on the shore. They come out and they fill both boats so full of fish that they began to sink. Peter throws himself at Jesus' knees and says, "Lord, go away from me, because I am a sinful man." Jesus said, "Peter, don't be afraid. From now on you are going to catch men." And they left their boats and followed him. These commercial fishermen recognized, in the catch of fish, that God was at work. They had eyes that saw the miracle at hand. And these four fishermen, from that day forward, dedicated their lives to following Jesus Christ and they became four of the 12 apostles.

What we see in our passage, what we see in this fish story today, is the ingredients for a miracle, the ingredients for God to do a mighty work. We first of all find that they had eyes to see. Jesus saw fish that Peter could not see. Jesus saw opportunity that Peter

wouldn't dream of, because it was the wrong time of the day. When they let down their nets and they caught the fish, it was the commercial fishermen that had eyes to see that this was not ordinary. This was extraordinary. This could not happen during the middle of the day unless God was in it. It changed their lives forever. Peter and the other fishermen recognized this catch as a miracle. Many people had seen steam raise the lid on a kettle, but it was only James Watt that saw in that an action that would produce a steam engine. Sir Isaac Newton saw an apple fall off an apple tree. Many had seen that before, but it was only with the eyes to see that he saw in that the concept of gravity. God is constantly at work for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear. If we are watching, if we are looking, God is always at work. The first element for God to show up and show out, is those of us who have eyes to see and ears to hear.

The second element is someone willing to work, someone willing to make an effort even when it may not seem to make sense at the moment. Peter said, "Lord, we have fished hard all night long. We've caught nothing. It's the wrong time of the day. We've already put up our nets. Everything is already done, but because you say so, because **you** say so, we'll put down the nets." God can only work if we will put forth the effort, if we will try. Hear me, please. If you fail, trying to do the right thing, it is not a sin. If you fail, trying to do the right thing, it is not a sin. If you fail, trying to do the right thing, it is not a sin. The sin is not trying at all. That's the sin. It's not a sin to try and fail. Please hear me. Too often, churches are paralyzed by fear of failure. If you fail (I want you to hear me say this), so what? Fail while trying. Fail while giving an effort. When Jesus comes back, he's going to find me working, even if it's making mistakes. (That was supposed to be funny!) What I want you to hear is, it's okay to fail. Trust me, when Peter let down the nets during the middle of the day, do you know what he expected? Absolute failure! He said, "Because you said so, Lord, I'll do it." Conditions for God to work require those who have eyes to see and a spirit that is willing to put forth the effort.

Also, miracles occur when people will attempt the impossible and the hopeless. If you wait till all of the conditions are right, you will never start. That is true of individuals. It is true of churches. There is no such thing as the perfect moment. The conditions are never completely right. I have known people that for years did nothing because there was always the excuse of, "The conditions aren't right. The circumstances are not right." What is true of individuals is also true of churches. We must take Jesus at his word and put out into the deep. If we take Jesus at his word and put out into the deep, we'll be telling fish stories of our own. The one that we caught that gets larger every year. And the one that got away who's huge to begin with. But we must have eyes that see. In order to have eyes to see, we must be watching, we must be looking, and we must be expecting God to show opportunities. We must make the effort to work, to try, even if it's making mistakes. Not be afraid to fail, but to give the effort. Trust God like it all depends on God and work like it all depends on you. And we must be willing to follow Jesus out into the deep water when the conditions are not ideal.

I have been with you six months now, over six months, right? And I have been getting the same message from God that I don't like. That message continually has been: wait. I don't like wait. I'm beginning to get a different message. Now I know what the numbers are. Y'all don't throw anything at me, especially my wife. I know what the numbers are and I'm still getting the message: wait. But it's followed by: walk, don't run. I feel like an

elementary school teacher. Wait. Walk. Don't run. What I feel is, this is time for us to have eyes that see and ears that hear the opportunities around us that abound for us, to get out into the community and for us to get the community in here. It's time for us to wait, walk, don't run. If you have been watching the announcements over the last couple of months, you will see that we are planning things for this summer that haven't been planned for two years: Vacation Bible School, the Color Run. And it's been years since you had a Family Camp. At the end of April, we're hoping to have an open house for our Sunday school and begin teaching volunteers again to work in the classrooms. I'm dreaming of a quilting group. Me, of all people, dreaming of a quilting group. And a Single Again class. And a class to help our parents with positive discipline. And there are many other opportunities that are available to us if we have eyes that see, and ears that hear, and the willingness to work and to make an effort even when success is unlikely. So, I'm leaving you with these words: wait, walk, don't run. But keep your eyes and your ears open as God makes opportunities available for you as an individual and for us as a congregation. Let's pray.

Lord, give us eyes that see, ears that hear. May we be open to the opportunities, no matter how unlikely they may be, that abound around us so that we might be Your hands and Your feet to this community. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.