

DEEP SEA FISHING Luke 5:1-11

I know this isn't a good day to think about the beach, but that's where I want to take you today. Not to Lewes beach and not to the Polar Bear swim in Rehoboth, but to a beach somewhere in Galilee about 2,000 years ago. That's where we'll find Jesus today in Luke's 5th chapter. He's starting to attract a lot of attention with his preaching. After all, he's been preaching in the synagogue in Nazareth, his home town and he healed Peter's mother in law in Capernaum. Everywhere he goes the crowds want to get near him to hear more of this new teaching. And in this passage, Luke tells us that it's getting a little crowded there on that beach.

Just down from where he stood, Jesus spots a couple of boats. They're not being used because the fishermen left them there to go wash their nets. You see, they'd been fishing all night and hadn't caught a thing. So, the only thing to do now is get ready for the next day's fishing trip by washing and

repairing their nets.

Jesus gets into one of the boats, which just happens to belong to Simon Peter. He asks Simon to push the boat away from the shore. This way, not only can Jesus keep a safe distance from the smothering crowd, his voice can travel across the surface of the water so they can hear him better.

Every good preacher likes to use an illustration or two in their sermons. As Jesus wraps up his sermon this day, he decides to use an illustration—a very dramatic illustration! He challenges Simon to, “*Push out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch*” (v. 4).

Did you hear that? Jesus said to put out into the *DEEP* water, He didn't say, “*Hey, it's shallow over here, try this.*” No. What he's saying is that the REAL possibilities exist where it's risky; where things get really deep. And that's what Jesus invites us to

do too—to take chances; to be adventurous; to be active; to be a VERB!

Simon says to Jesus, *“Master, we’ve been fishing hard all night and haven’t even caught a minnow.”* Sounds to me like he wants to play it safe; to stay close to shore; to stay in his comfort zone because his time on the water didn’t produce any fish. But Simon isn’t going to give Jesus a hard time about this. He says, *“But if you say so, I’ll let out the nets.”* And he does.

Guess what happens? Simon and his pals catch so many fish that their nets start to rip open! They yell for their buddies in the other boat to come over and help them. They catch so many fish that both boats begin to sink! (vv. 6-7).

Now, I’m happy when I catch two or three bass in a day, or a half dozen blue fish on the surf. But this catch is incredible! Why? Because they were willing

to follow Jesus’ instructions, to trust him, to leave their comfort zones, and go out into the deep water with him, .

I think that’s the challenge for us today as a church and as individuals. Jesus wants us to go deep sea fishing with him; to get out of our comfort zones and put out into the deep water of Christian discipleship. Too often we like to stay close to the shore where it’s safe, comfortable and familiar. But Jesus is calling us to be active, adventurous, risk-takers and willing to explore new territory. Fishermen around here know that the big fish, the big catches are out there offshore, in the deep water. Jesus knows that’s too. That’s where spiritual growth happens; that’s where we can learn new things about God, about ourselves, about others, and about our community!

Ok. So what does this mean for us here at Bethel? What does it mean to to the deep water of ministry to our community?

Well, we go deep sea fishing whenever we venture out to share the Christian faith with our friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors. Jesus says, “*There is nothing to fear. From now on you'll be fishing for men and women.*” (v. 10). This challenges us to reach out to people we already know with the gospel message. Remember the FRAN plan? That's an evangelism program developed years ago by the UM church where we focus faith sharing efforts with Friends, Relatives, Associates, and Neighbors. This kind of “relationship evangelism, is one of the most effective ways of reaching people for Christ that I know of...and it works!

Martha Grace Reese, in her book *Unbinding the Gospel*, says that “*our most important discovery is that a vivid relationship with God lies at the heart of real evangelism.*” Right now our Evangelism Team is working on several new projects to help us reach more people for Christ, beginning with our own

congregation. We're focusing on the gift of hospitality and how we meet and greet first time visitors and guests...developing a culture of greeters, not just a couple of people greeting people at the door, among other things.

Let me ask you a question. Has being a Christian made any difference in your life? If it has, don't you think that's something worth sharing with other people? You see, evangelism is simply the realizing that your life is better because of your relationship with Jesus, and this is a relationship that can benefit others as well.

Evangelism. It means different thing to different people. I've always believed that evangelism is all about relationships. Not just high-pressure manipulation, not altar calls, not tent revivals, but genuine relationships. We won't reach people for Jesus until we first get to know the person. Each of us needs to think about our relationship with God

and then find genuine, sincere, and loving ways to share that relationship with others....

We also go deep sea fishing when we welcome Christians of different races and nationalities into our congregations. God says through the prophet Isaiah, “[M]y house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (emphasis mine) (56:7), but the fact of the matter is, only about seven percent of congregations in the United States are multiracial! Folks, we're going to have to do a better job at this church thing if we're going to be vital centers for ministry and relevant in our increasingly multicultural society. Take a look around Lewes. Who do you see? People of all different races, nationalities and cultures. Now take a look around you. What do you see?

I don't have to tell you that this transition is not easy. But every congregation needs to find new ways to reach out and embrace those different from us—the

immigrant, the foreigner, the stranger. But we've also got to do it in ways that don't alienate native-born members.

So how do we do this? Well, some churches have tried incorporating some multicultural worship into their services, like we did for World Communion Sunday. I have a stole made in Guatemala that I wear on that Sunday. We could, from time to time, learn new songs from other countries sung in English, Spanish, Creole, or Korean. These are just a few things we could do to try and connect with those of other cultures and races.

Finally, we go deep sea fishing when we go on short-term mission trips, or when we commit ourselves to tutoring low-income children who are struggling in school, or when we create alternative worship services to reach the unchurched of our community. All of these things take a passion for Christ and a compassion for people. It takes an

adventurous spirit and a willingness to take some risks to explore new territory!

Bottom line: We've got to get out of our comfort zones and quit playing church on Sunday mornings and BE what the Church needs to be today! The church, our church, every church, should be a VERB in it's community!

Folks, it's like this. We can't know the joys of the abundant life in Christ by playing it safe! If we're going to experience growth, be it spiritual or numerical, be it in faith or understanding, we've got to venture out and take some chances! Jesus said to his followers a little later in Luke, “[T]hose who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it” (9:24).

That’s the message for all of us today. We've got to let some things die in us before we can be alive in Christ! Life comes from death — from allowing our

comfort and control to die, just a little bit, as we follow Jesus in faith. And we all know what comes after death, don't we? Resurrection!

Deep sea fishing can be risky. Fishermen put their faith in their compasses and other electronic devices to get to the fishing grounds, and back home again. Likewise, each of us is challenged to take similar chances as we follow Jesus along the path of life each and every day. Sure, we'll have our setbacks and disappointments. We'll stumble and fall in our walk of faith. We'll even have people tell us to “bug off” and mind our own business.

And we'll surely lose our own way from time to time. But the good news is that, when we walk with the Lord, and listen to his Word, when we get into the boat with Jesus, we'll make amazing discoveries along the way...if we just trust him and let him lead us into the deep waters of ministry!