

The setting of today's scripture takes place on the Sea of Tiberias (the Roman name for the Sea of Galilee). The disciples are in a depressed mood because of the horrific events leading to, and culminating in, the death of Jesus. They have gone to Galilee and returned to what they knew best: fishing. And as you know, they catch nothing. When they return, deflated, the first voice they hear asks if they have any fish. They are ashamed to say that they have not caught a single fish all night, but they finally admit the truth. The voice calls back: "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." It seems stupid. They have been fishing all night without success. They still have the nets in the water on the left side of the boat and nothing is happening. What possible difference could it make to put the net in on the right side? They are professional fishermen, and they have no idea who this stranger is. But for some unknown reason they unquestioningly take out the nets and throw them into the water on the other side of their boat. And the Bible says, "When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish." They are stunned at what has happened and it suddenly dawns on them who it is who has been calling to them. It could be no one else. The Bible says, "Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!'"

Now that story is very familiar, but have you wondered why it is so familiar? Well it's possibly because it's happened before. Luke tells the story which happens as Jesus' ministry is just beginning, before these men actually knew him. Again they catch nothing, Jesus gets into the boat and asks Simon to 'Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.' And surprise surprise they catch so many fish, that their nets began to break.

Jesus' relationship with the disciples begins and ends with a miraculous catch of fish. They meet him in the miracle. And so there are a couple of lessons we can learn from this story :

The first lesson is this - It is important to obey Jesus.

In both stories it must have been difficult for fishermen to listen to the suggestions of a carpenter. After all, this was their profession, not his. They knew about fishing, and were perhaps some of the best fishermen on the Sea of Galilee. Besides, what Jesus was suggesting did not make any sense. What possible difference could it make to put the net on the other side of the boat?

Sometimes God puts us in situations where it seems like there is no answer. We have tried everything. We thought we knew what needed to be done. It worked before, so we think we already know how to do it, and now someone is telling us a simplistic answer that drives us up the wall. Perhaps God is asking us to do something beyond what is simplistic, it may even seem like something foolish. It is counterintuitive.

Jesus tested the disciple's obedience so that they could learn that blessings follow obedience. In your relationship with God, success follows obedience, even when what he is asking you to do seems ridiculous to you. You are not smarter than God. You can't keep doing the same things and expect different results. Success comes as we are willing to listen to Jesus and do what he says, and this therefore involves humility. Jesus wants us to have a teachable spirit. This for me is one of the most important characteristics that you can have in life. In church life I sometimes come across people who really don't want advice. They don't want to hear it and so they never learn. You have to have humility and a willing spirit. King David in his great penitential prayer said, "Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me" ([Psalm 51:12](#)). You have to be willing to listen to Jesus and do what he says.

The second lesson in this story is: We meet God when we come to the end of our resources.

The disciples had been fishing all night. They had done all they could. They were at the end of their tether. Their resources were spent. That's when God shows up. At the point where we give up is often when God shows up.

Simon Peter was certainly at the end of his resources. He had boasted that if everyone else left Jesus, he would still be faithful, but he wasn't. He had failed. He played the coward. He failed Jesus.

It's interesting that the Greek word for charcoal fire is found in only two places in the New Testament. Here in this story where Jesus is cooking fish for the disciple's breakfast, and the other is when Peter stood warming himself after the arrest of Jesus in the courtyard. It was there that Peter denied the Lord and saw Jesus look at him as the cock crowed. As he smelled the charcoal fire on the shore this day, he must have been taken back again to that shame filled moment in the courtyard. Peter realized that he was at the end of his resources. He knew now that there was nothing good left in him.

It's actually a good thing to come to the end of our resources and realize our weakness, so that we give in to God. We realize we can't do anything on our own anyway, so we ask him to completely take over, and determine that we will do whatever it is he wants us to do. We stop trying to make things happen and let him have his way. And, amazingly, that is when things begin to happen. When we as a church and as individuals completely surrender to the will of God, that is when begin to see what God can really do.

When everything you have tried in life turns out to be nothing, he can make something out of it. He creates fish and bread. He gives health where there was only sickness. He gives strength when there was only weakness. He gives life where there was only death. He gives hope where there was only despair. He gives forgiveness where there was only shame. He is the God of new beginnings. When we reach the end of ourselves, we come to the beginning of him.

We come here today as individuals with needs, but also as a church body with needs. Have we in both situations stopped to hear what God is instructing us to do? Have we come to the end of our own options, and realized that we need to come in humility before God and submit to his will? Sometimes the things that God wants us to do for his church might seem so obvious that they seem rather ridiculous or too simple. As I have prayed regularly for our church, I am more and more convinced that the answer to the future of our church lies first and foremost in the need for humility, to acknowledge before God that we cannot do things in our own resources, and that in obedience we come open and willing to be guided by his direction. If we are going to fish, we have to put down our nets where God directs us to. If you are going to receive the answer God has for you, you are going to have to do what he says, when he says it and where he says to do it.