

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

Vicar Jason Fugate

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Grace to you and peace from God, our Creator, and our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

I want to begin this morning by thinking about how stories are told. Oftentimes, we hear stories in a straightforward, linear pattern. First, this happens, then the next thing, and finally, a conclusion.

Sometimes though there are stories that aren't quite so straightforward. Novels, movies, television shows, and other forms of entertainment We watch events happen out of the chronological order and we uncover throughout the process new insights at different points in time that help shape the story.

This uneven way of telling stories allows for multiple points of rising tension, more "aha" moments, and multiple climatic moments that happen throughout the format instead of simply at the end.

When stories are told this way, oftentimes, there are swathes of time left out. The audience just assumes there is not much happening at these points, those parts of the narrative do not add on to the story.

In our Gospel, this lesson has been told in ways that can be harmful, especially to those who are pushed out to the margins. It's been weaponized in harmful ways and told disingenuously to justify the mindsets of scarcity and superiority. It's necessary to cast our nets deeper and investigate the ways that this lesson can speak to God's love, abundance, and care for those who are marginalized.

The temptation when we hear this lesson is to think of it as one where Jesus always gives, and we always get what we want. The fishermen have a hard time, Jesus makes the fish appear, and the fishermen follow Jesus. We know though, that as we call out to God in prayer, in thought, and in deed, many times our hopes do not materialize. Many of us can think of a time when we have cast down the nets and still, we pulled up no fish.

The abundance that God provides for the world is so much more than putting fish in the nets of a few individuals. These fishermen had caught many fish before and knew the sea beneath them teemed with life. Christ does not make the fish appear; he encourages the fishermen in a discouraging time. The abundance is always there, Christ simply offers uplifting words as they harvest it.

This begins to tell a much different story. Not one where Jesus rewards some and others get left to fight for themselves. No, this is a lesson about how God's abundance is meant to be shared with all. The crowds who came to hear Jesus witness this miracle, the nets overflowing with food that they can partake in. The Earth provides for us, and the fishermen celebrate what an amazing harvest they have.

The Son of God came down to interact with the people during their everyday work. He was not stuck only in the places of worship or in the most prestigious halls of power. No, Jesus is on the boat, on the shore, with the crowds, welcoming them to see his ministry, to hear his words, and to share in food together.

Yes, Jesus works through us in the day to day, even when we don't see it. We know there are so many who are excluded from the abundance of the Earth, and I know we here at Wicker Park and across the church, move to bring people into that

abundance. It is easy to feel like the fishermen who work tirelessly and would like to see more of the fruits of our labor, feeling like our effort and passion is to no avail.

That is where our faith is so vital. The faith that God CAN provide, that there IS enough for all, and that the Spirit can use us to transform this world. When that work can feel hollow, we have faith that God is doing more than we can know. After all, our story, this story of Christianity and faithfulness, is a story not just about you and me but one that stretches back long before any of us and will continue long after us.

We also know from this Gospel, that some of these fishermen, like Simon Peter and the sons of Zebedee, become disciples of Christ. They follow him and do many things in his name even after the resurrection. It would seem they are so stunned by what transpired in that boat alone that they changed their lives forever.

I don't want to take away from the miracle or that experience of witnessing Jesus and the power and love that he displayed but they had long lives before that lead them to that point.

Indeed, many experiences, trust in God, and their own desire for community helped open them to what Jesus was teaching.

It helps give a more expansive understanding of the call to discipleship that Jesus gives. "Do not be afraid, from now on you will be catching people." This can be read with a problematic understanding, but Jesus isn't calling for these fishermen or anyone else to bait or coerce someone into faith. Jesus opens them to the possibility that this world can be good.

That community together is stronger than hate that divides us. That we are better off when everyone is included and welcomed FULLY and not pushed away. That we can learn to be harvesters of abundance and that we will SHARE that with everyone.

When you're in seminary, you get really used to sharing and writing about your "call" story or how you were moved to work towards becoming a pastor. When telling these stories there is a desire to point out the one climatic moment when God really moved or changed your heart.

It would be cool if I had one of those "aha" moments or a really exciting story but in truth, my call formed in little bits over my life. A moment here, a person there, a church congregation who welcomed me in and made me feel safe and loved. Along the way, I learned what it can mean to serve God and to love my neighbor. I am certainly no expert in the matter, but I experienced in my day-to-day life, what it meant to be in community with others who could love one another, strive for justice, and welcome me in when I was a stranger.

Here in this place, we are all called to serve God. Whatever our vocation or our skills are, we can lift them up and offer them to God. We keep our nets clean and we toss them into the water again and again. We have faith that God's love, mercy, and abundance surrounds us. We have faith that all of this is not meant just for us or that there is not enough to go around.

We are called to invite, to give aid to those in need, and to dismantle the systematic problems that keep people away from all the world and what God gives to them.

That abundance was not meant for only the few who have the most inspirational stories, only the few who have the money to pay for it, or only the few who have some inside wisdom into God's commands. This abundance was meant for

EVERYONE. When we embody that in our lives, in our church, in our communities, this is when we live into our call as Christians. There's no bait or catching, we set out as harvesters, the work is done through the Spirit, and we can run into each other's arms with love and care, thankful for the Earth and all the gifts that God provides.

Let us pray. Dear Jesus, we are so thankful for your love and mercy that you pour onto us. We ask that you be with us, as you were during your ministry, as we go about our everyday lives. Remind us that all that we do can glorify you. Where there is need, you can provide. Move us to remove the obstacles that keep people away from the provisions for their basic needs and strive for justice where there is inequity. Hold us in your tender love and encourage us for the work ahead. Amen.