

Put Your Nets Into the Deep Water

Rev. Dr. Scott Ramsey

Psalm 138; Luke 5:1-11
Lewinsville Presbyterian Church
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“Put out into the deep water and let your nets down for a catch.”

On this Annual Congregational Meeting Sunday, as Lewinsville Presbyterian is marking the pivot from the year that is past to the year that is to come, what does this command of our Lord mean for us? What does it mean for you in your life and your ministry, your own calling in the world? What is your net, and what is it that you are catching? Where do you need to go to find the deep water?

Jesus calls out to Simon: “Put your nets into the deep water.” This is a powerful call for us, in all of the different spheres of our lives. I hope you can hear that this call of Jesus is not just for people who are in seminary. It is certainly not just for people who are highly educated. After all, the folks in Luke 5 were ordinary, working-class fishermen. Each of us, no matter where we are, no matter where we’ve come from, is called to put out our nets into the deep water.

Jesus calls Simon to *work*. Now, if we are exhausted and tired, this may not be the word we’re looking for from Jesus right now. And Simon let Jesus know that. “Lord, we’re tired. We’ve fished all night.” Or, “Lord, we’re tired. We’ve been dealing with this pandemic for two years. We’re in the midst of all these disagreements and conflicts. Things are just not going the way we want. We’re tired, and we’re discouraged.” When that’s the way we’re feeling, we need to say those things to Jesus. If you’ve been working on something, and it’s not happening, let God know you’re discouraged. Take it to Jesus in prayer. And see how your discouragement shifts when you put it into prayer.

It seems significant that Jesus calls Simon to the *deep* water. Almost like he’s saying, Don’t just go for the quick and shallow win. Don’t look for this to be easy. Put out into the deep waters. Listen deeply to the world, to others, and to yourself. Move slowly and attentively. Put out into the deep.

But at another level, we must realize that there’s nothing magic about the deep water. “Putting your nets into the deep” is not a technique to be used for getting what you want. The life of faith is not about mastering a few techniques to achieve success.

The life of faith is about listening to Jesus and following him. Full stop.

And that is both simpler than we might expect, and far more demanding. The life of faith is about living in an ongoing, give-and-take, dialogical relationship with the living God, who cannot be controlled and cannot be fooled. In Psalm 138 that Leslie read, verse 6 tells us that the Lord perceives – or knows – the haughty from far away, which suggests that the Lord is onto their games from a mile away. The living God knows our games, God knows our exhaustion. God’s call is addressed *to* our exhaustion, but God’s call is not hamstrung *by* our exhaustion. “Put your nets out into the deep water” is what the Lord says to you and to me as individuals, and to us as a congregation.

The life of faith is a back-and-forth dialogue with God. In the Psalm, the psalmist says to God, “On the day that I called, you answered me.” But in Luke 5, it is Jesus who says to Simon, “Put out your nets,” and *Simon* answers *him*: “Because you say so, I will do it.” We call out to God, God calls out to us. We call out to God, God calls out to us. Give and take, back and forth. *That* is the life of faith.

And notice, friends, that the life of faith does not curve in on itself. The call and response do not simply bounce back and forth between us and God. A new thing springs forth from this dialogue, there is a “new arising,” for now, Simon and his friends will be catching people. The conversation between Simon and Jesus does not stay between Simon and Jesus. It reaches out to include others. The dialogue with God always opens up into mission. In the next 3 weeks, we’re going to be doing a deep dive into Matthew 25, as a way of exploring the church’s calling to engage the realities of racism – in our world and in ourselves. We’re going to be listening for how Jesus’ call to put our nets out into the deep water summons us to face and engage the public realities of sin and pain and exclusion in our world. Dialogue with God always yields into mission.

When you think about your life, where do you think Jesus is calling you to go? Where are you experiencing discouragement in your life, discouragement that you can bring to the Lord in prayer? And how might Jesus be calling you, not to give up, but to put out into deeper water and let down your nets? What about our congregation? How is the Lord calling us into the deep water? What might it mean to catch people with the life-giving presence of Christ? How are we called to reach out to Afghan refugees? How are we being called to reach out across racial divides? How are we being called to reach out in a time of bitter alienation and violence and fear, where we’ve seen this past week a shooting at Bridgewater College and bomb threats at historically black colleges and universities? How are we being called to reach out in this time of loneliness and exhaustion for so many people? Put out into the deep water, and let down your nets, Lewinsville Presbyterian Church. To God and to God alone, be all the glory. Amen.