

“The Church Is Not an Island”

Luke 5:1-11

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The church is not an island! I hope that you and especially our Tongan language ministry team will NOT misunderstand me. I mean that the church should be not be an isolated place from our community but should be ‘a connectional conduit’ to our Fair Oaks community through our ministries. Our church is called to reach out to our neighbors, make connections, and make any difference in the community we can as a messenger of God’s love and as a bridge builder between the church and our neighbors. What special things do we have to offer for our neighbors? This morning, I want us to rethink our church’s mission, role, and spiritual identity as a church in the Fair Oaks community. Let me challenge you with a question. ***In the Fair Oaks community, what is our church known for?***

A couple of months ago, I was invited to attend Jim and Jean Strathdee’s house concert. They had just released a new album, *Miracle of Dawn*. During the concert, they introduced their new music and promoted their album as well. One of the songs that stood out to me and inspired me was a song titled “Tuvalu.” Jim and Jean composed this song out of their compassionate heart for a small and tiny island named Tuvalu in the South Pacific that now faces an urgent climate crisis; it is feared that the whole island nation might disappear within the next century. Jim and Jean challenge the rising impact of global warming and climate change issues in this song. this island, Tuvalu, is one of the smallest island nations in the world, with approximately 11,000 people as of 2003. Due to the change in global temperatures, the sea level continues to rise. It rose one meter last century, and the entire island of Tuvalu is no higher than 15 feet (3-4 meters).¹ If the world does not take immediate action against global warming, this small nation’s people will be the first climate refugees! I hope that the world’s nations will cooperate to save this nation and people!

Global warming is not the point of this sermon, however. I am just imagining our church’s destiny in relation to the island of Tuvalu. Just think about this question for a moment. ***What if we had to close our church tomorrow due to many challenges like the island, Tuvalu, is facing—who would grieve over our disappearance from the community?*** Has our church

¹ <https://germanwatch.org/download/klak/fb-tuv-e.pdf>. Accessed Aug.12, 2017.

has been known for something special in our community? It would be sad if no one would mourn the closing of our church.

In today's Scripture reading, the lake of Gennesaret is another name of the Sea of Galilee. The crowd was seeking the word of God from Jesus at the shore of the lake. Among the crowd, there were some fishermen, including Peter, with a couple of boats nearby. As we know, they had been out fishing all night, but they couldn't catch any fish. We can easily imagine how they would feel. They must have been very discouraged and disappointed when they were cleaning their nets. After Jesus was done teaching the crowds, he looked over to Simon and said, "Go out a little further, to the deep water, and let down your nets." Another Bible translation describes this way: "Push out into deep water and let your nets for a catch." Jesus simply said to Peter, "Let's leave the shallows and go to the deep water to throw your nets." We already know what happened. The Bible says that they went and filled both boats with fish.

I am always curious why Jesus often used fishing metaphors to describe his disciples' calling when he taught his disciples and followers about truth and spiritual inspiration. What fascinated Jesus about the act of fishing? And what did Jesus intend to remind us to learn from today's Bible story? The disciples were surprised by unexpected blessings when they threw their nets as Jesus instructed. What happened?

Let us talk about fishing first. Honestly, I am not a fan of fishing. When I was young, I went fishing a couple of times, but I never caught anything. That was it! David Barry, a Pulitzer Prize winning author, has joked, "Fishing is boring, unless you catch an actual fish, and then it is disgusting." Well, I tried to focus on a positive side of fishing and understand Jesus' intent and the purpose of his story. I don't think that Jesus was a fishing expert either because he had never been trained as a fisherman. Rather, he was probably raised in a carpenter's or peasant's family. Definitely, Jesus wanted his disciples to discover spiritual points from his suggestion. An English poet, Ted Hughes gives me a clue to understanding the deeper meaning of the fishing metaphor. He says, "Fishing provides that connection with the whole living world. It gives you the opportunity of being totally immersed, turning back into yourself in a good way. A form of meditation, some form of communion with levels of yourself that are deeper than the ordinary self."² But Jesus emphasized more than this! He urged the disciples to make a connection between two worlds, such as 'under water' and 'above water' and 'fisherman' and 'fish.' And he also called his disciples and the church to be a conduit of God's love through their bold action, such as "going to the deep water" or "throwing your nets for a

² <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/fishing.html>. Accessed August 11, 2017.

catch.” Jesus was clear that the church should not remain a remote or isolated island. Instead, we are called to do something to be part of the community.

What was the consequence of the story in today’s Scripture message? The disciples experienced a transformative change when they followed Jesus’ suggestion. In other words, they had been empty-handed, but now they received an abundance. Jesus’ point was that we can go from emptiness to abundance. Please do not get me wrong. Abundance doesn’t only mean prosperity—it can be levels of community shalom in our communion through the connection between church and community by sharing God’s love, peace, and hope in Christ Jesus. When the fishermen were in despair after they came home with empty nets, Jesus taught them a new way to be full and thrive in their lives. Jesus also challenges our church to be a fisherman for our community. What do we need to do or what can we do for our community?

Let’s recap what Jesus did with Peter and his disciples. Jesus asked Peter to try two things: 1. Push out into deep water, and 2. Let your nets out for a catch. Let us go a little deeper and further to find more meaning in this. What did Jesus mean by “go to the deep water”? How does this directional teaching challenge us? The Sea of Galilee is the largest freshwater lake in Israel. It is about 13 miles long and 8 miles wide. The depth of the lake is about 141 feet. When you come closer to the deep water, the color of the water gets darker. It could be overwhelming if you were to sit in a kayak or fishing boat by yourself. When Jesus challenged his disciples to go to places of ‘deep water,’ it definitely required them to have courage, trust, and boldness. This is risky and uncomfortable. In the same way, Jesus challenges our church to go to the deep water of our community and receive God’s abundance! Again, reaching the deep water requires us to be bold and courageous, to come out of our comfort zone and take risks. The fishermen couldn’t catch anything because they simply refused to go deep. Now Jesus challenges us to go deep to receive abundant blessings.

Friends, I hope that we will be more creative and bold and will dream up some unique and special ministries for our community! For example, I imagine a special ministry for single parents and their children, or single grandparents and their grandchildren, or what about special support for parents who are raising foster kids or parents with special needs children among our neighbors? We have a great caring ministry team, the Life Challenge Group. Loretta Dodge and Rachele Doty serve this ministry. What if we invite single moms or dads to our potluck as guests? We invite them to join our Life Challenge Group while we offer a special children’s program? What about setting up a special free day for children for our LMS (Little Methodist School), inviting LMS parents and young parents who are our neighbors to come and meet us at our potluck social

gathering, offering them the opportunity to meet our school teachers and church members and to get acquainted with one another. And the children will have a chance to experience our excellent teachers through a fun program!

You may claim that these ideas are not realistic. And you may say that the pastor is a dreamer! That's okay. Betty Phillips shared that a couple of days ago, she tried a new a taco that she had never tried before from a restaurant's menu, and she had the worst Taco that she ever had in her life, but she said it was fine. She learned something from her experiment. Jesus is calling us to go into the deep water and take a risk and throw out our nets. I seriously invite you to imagine what it might mean for our church to cast our nets deep. Indeed, Jesus, our spiritual fishing coach, encourages us to go into the deep and reach a place where there are abundant blessings. I hope and pray that we all discern this call for our church's future. Our church should not be an island like Tuvalu but should be a channel of blessings sharing and spreading God's abundance with our Fair Oaks community and neighbors. May the blessings of God flow through our church's serving hands and ministries. Amen.