

[BLANK] Good Morning! Well, we had some nice warm days for a while, but now it's back to winter. The seasons change, and come back to us again, and again. What a glory is God's creation, Amen?

We are going to be in the church season of Epiphany the rest of this month. We're still in the season of seeing what cannot be unseen, through faith in Jesus Christ, as the Magi did. The story of Jesus is moving forward. Now, an adult Jesus, in the gospel of Luke, is showing the world more things that cannot be unseen, or unheard.

And like the story of Jesus in Luke's gospel, God is inviting us today to move away from our everyday assumptions, into deeper waters, where new miracles of faith will challenge us. We can't unsee what we've seen. We can't unhear what we've heard. And, through faith in Jesus Christ, God is calling us to new moments when God's Holy Spirit will plant in our hearts the words: “From now on.” Will you pray with me, please.

[PRAYER]

Just as seasons turn in a regular cycle, so does our story-telling in the church. [LECTIONARY] Our Bible readings in our church usually follow a pattern called the lectionary calendar. The lectionary calendar has three years' worth of readings. Every three years, we go back to the beginning, and start the lectionary calendar again. The exact order of the readings will change a bit from year to year, because our Easter celebration shifts every year, but in general, every three years, we're going to hear familiar words. Generally, I follow the lectionary, so that we can be united with Christians all over the world, as we study the same Bible readings together. [BLANK]

Six years ago, I had an important day in my life when the lectionary came to today's readings. We had just moved to Guilford, and I wanted to see if I was really ready to respond to God's call to become an ordained Pastor. I went for an interview at our local divinity school, and it felt good, it felt right, but I wasn't quite sure whether feeling good would be good enough.

[CHAPEL] My host invited me to join the school at their daily chapel worship. The opening hymn was “Come Thou, Fount of Every Blessing,” the hymn that we just sang. I was hardly aware of the hymn for most of my life, but then, a year before that day in chapel, the angels of God sang it to me when, unknown to me, my mother was dying. Almost exactly a year later, hearing that hymn told me that God was preparing me for something more. Their Bible reading was today's reading from Luke 5 - Jesus inviting Peter into deeper waters, on the Sea of Galilee.

[BLANK] I identify a lot with Peter. Sometimes, Peter was a little dense. Sometimes, it seems that Jesus needed to whack Peter on the head with with a two-by-four to get a point across, or to take a chance on something new. In the chapters before today's story, Peter had seen Jesus command a demon to come out of a sick man, and had seen Jesus heal his own mother. Peter saw what he could not unsee, heard what he could not unhear. But Peter really hadn't seen or heard what Jesus was calling him to. Like me in that school chapel, Peter just wasn't getting it yet. Peter really wasn't taking a life-changing chance on Jesus.

After a trip south to Judah, Jesus returned to Peter’s town, and people from all over came to hear Jesus preach. Jesus asked Peter and other fishermen to come with him on a boat, a little ways from the shore, so more people could hear Jesus. You might say that’s like my early days in Christian discipleship. I was with Jesus, I was in the boat, but I wasn’t in all that deep. If I changed my mind, it would be a quick dash back to dry land, where others were listening safely. I could still be just a face in the crowd, if I wanted to, on solid ground. I wasn’t taking a real chance.

It’s one thing to hear the words of Jesus. It’s one thing to be in the boat with Jesus. But it’s another thing to go fishing with Jesus, and still another thing to fish where Jesus tells you to fish. In that chapel, I heard how Jesus asked Peter to go fish in the deep waters of the Sea of Galilee, a place totally out of Peter’s comfort zone.

[POND] You see, the Sea of Galilee is like our Hanover Pond, just up the street. If you’ve ever seen it drained, you can see the Quinnipiac River in the deepest part, but it’s mostly very shallow. The Sea of Galilee is like that: it’s very shallow, with the Jordan River coming in at the north end, and leaving on the south end. It’s only a bit deeper way in the middle - right on the edge of water that was in the territory of other nations. [BLANK]

Jesus took Peter away from the shores, from the audience of faith, into a rocky boat in the shallows of discipleship, and Peter was feeling pretty good about Jesus. Everything was safe. His livelihood and his life weren’t in danger. Being with Jesus was comfy, really. [BOAT] But then, the command came from Jesus: “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.”

This is where the story gets interesting. Peter got scared. He was scared of being embarrassed in front of all of his friends and family. He was scared that he would look like a horrible fisherman, not producing a miracle up to the standards of Jesus. And he was scared not only of deep waters, but also because Jesus was asking him to fish where he wasn’t welcomed, a place where his people didn’t go; just being there meant trouble. [BLANK]

So Peter came up with a story to cover his butt, to cover up his fear. “Well, the fishing stinks today, Jesus, but, oh well, let’s go, let’s do it.” Peter and Jesus got out to the middle of the water. And then, the miracle came. It was a huge catch. Almost more than they could get to shore. Peter deserved none of it. It was all from Jesus. Jesus had given Peter abundance, more than Peter could ask or imagine. Peter was ashamed. Jesus couldn’t want him after he had doubted; could he? Peter was afraid. “Go away from me, Lord,” he said, “for I am a sinful man!”

Six years ago, in that chapel, I felt Peter’s shame. Jesus couldn’t want me, after all of my doubts, and my mistakes in responding to God’s call. Could he? After staying on the shores of faith so long, after taking my time in the shallow waters of discipleship, Jesus didn’t want me for real. Did he? The answer from Jesus in Luke’s gospel stuck to my heart like glue. I couldn’t unhear it. “Do not be afraid; from now on, you will be catching people.”

Six years later, I am in the deep water. I am hoping for a good catch, for the sake of

Jesus. I am grateful for what's come in, so far. Here's the trick from Luke's gospel, through: Peter and Jesus weren't alone. What good are boats and nets when you can't bring in the catch? How can you pull in the nets without others who have joined Jesus, out at their "from now on" moment of truth? You can't. Oh, sure, you'll catch a few, maybe, but not the abundance that faith in Jesus Christ promises to God's world.

We're doing pretty well as a church, right now. We have more people on the shoreline of faith, and a few in the boats of discipleship. And that's good. But to bring into this church the abundance of faith that Jesus needs to touch your life, and God's world, we need others out there in the deep waters of faith, with Jesus, and us, fishing for people.

I challenge you all, in the name of Jesus Christ, Son of God, and Son of all Humanity, to step over the line this year into the real deep waters of Christian discipleship. [PUT OUT TAPE] This tape will be here for as long as I am here. Make a note of that, Trustees; it's not going anywhere, for any thing, for anyone, at any time. It is the line that I invite you to cross, when God's Holy Spirit has called you to a "from now on" life with Jesus. It is the line that I invite you to cross, to pray here at this kneeler, and accept God's call to deep water faith in Jesus Christ.

You won't be alone. You won't be ashamed of your choice. And, through faith in Jesus Christ, the catch will be amazing - far more than all you can ask or imagine. People on the shore will be fed, and more will have the courage to get in the boat. But the miracle doesn't happen until people in get in the boats to bring the catch home. It will come from deep waters, far from where we've been fishing. Cross the line. Get in the boat. I have never regretted the decision for one moment. I hope and pray that you will, too, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.