



"Miracle Catch"
Mike Moyers, 2019

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Epiphany 5
February 6, 2022
Do Not be Afraid

Luke 5:1-11

Prayer: Grant light to our eyes and strength to our souls as you touch us once more with your word of truth. Appear to us as the risen Christ came to the disciples, that our lives may be made whole and our work on your behalf be productive...

One of the things I like about this 2019 painting by Mike Moyers is that you get a sense from the manner of the painting, the brush strokes, the light, the perspective that there's more

going on here than we can see clearly. The darker water around the fishing boats, the birds attracted to the area, gives the suggestion that something is going on beneath the surface. Something big, real, and not entirely revealed...

I've been thinking about those nets, those fishers, thinking about what it was like for them on that day. How they must have been amazed, and why Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid."

Do you fish? I don't. My Dad used to take us fishing when I was a little girl, on the jetty at the mouth of the Siuslaw River in Florence, Oregon. I liked it until the day he left me holding a fishing pole while he went back to the car to get something. "Um, Mommy, I think I have a fish." "Well..., can we keep it in the water until your dad gets back?" ... "I don't think so." I reeled it in. It was a sculpin. We called them "Devil Fish" because they had long poisonous horns. "The pacific staghorn sculpin." My Dad would wrap an old rag to hold them to get them off the hook and use them for crab bait. If you are not careful with them, you can get yourself seriously injured. I looked at my devil fish; it glared furiously at me. I could not get the hook out. The fish had swallowed it. Mom and I tried to work together. It was disgusting, and terrifying, and educational ... in the manner that dissecting something is educational.

I was so happy when my Dad got back. I was grateful to let him decide the fish's fate – whether it lived or died would not be in my hands anymore – it could be in the hands of an experienced fisherman. The fish could glare furiously at someone who understood it...and in the end we used that fish to catch a very nice dungenous crab – which was the real reason we went to the Oregon coast anyway. I still do not like to fish, ever since then. So much trauma and drama involved. Life, death, fear, boredom, and abundance. It's too much for me.

I tell you that story because the men who were fishing on that day on lake Gennesaret were not like me. *They* knew what they were doing. They were fishermen. *Professionals*. They understood about the schooling patterns of fish, they could picture the bottom of the lake in their minds eye as any fisher has to, and they knew to let down their nets; accordingly, they knew about where the seasonal feeding grounds were and when it was time to stop for the day. Today we would say that they practiced sustainable fishing: their nets were not so large and all-encompassing as to catch every fish in the lake. They caught some but left plenty of breeding stock, they left predators and their prey – animals all along the food chain. They knew their fish and they knew what they were doing, but they were not successful on that day.

And there are days like that, aren't there? Days when even though you have developed skill, good technique, expertise, it just is not coming together? These are empty net days. Part of the human condition.

This pandemic has given a lot of us empty net days. Another day we are not sick with Covid or passing it is a good day, but it is a low bar. Great. Just yesterday there was an editorial in the newspaper by a food writer, no less, "the pandemic made me depressed about dinner. Seems I'm not alone." She goes on to say that even though her job is to write about food, she's so tired of making family dinners, boxed mac and cheese with frozen peas stirred in, anything

with melted cheese – pizza something...instead of feeding the kids whatever the adults are having, I feed the adults whatever the kids are having...these tricks may get me through this winter of more discontent." Of course, she is complaining, but who can blame her?

Essential workers are exhausted, other workers are not back in their offices, and the culture of their work has changed so much that its hard to imagine a future normal. We are not going back to 2019.

Jesus told them to go back out and put their nets down on the other side of the boat. Do it again, go back, one more time. And this time, a big catch. So big in fact, they left it all to follow Jesus. To fish for people – souls—making a difference in a way that they had not imagined in their wildest dreams.

Jesus says to them "do not be afraid" Fear is a moment of choice. Whether to live in fear, or to push through fear to lives of faith, to put the nets down one more time, to pull in the nets with the miracle catch.

Nicholas Wolterstorff, a Professor at Yale, had a son Eric, who was killed at age 25 in a mountaineering accident. Long after the initial shock, he wrote a book about his feelings called *Lament for a Son*.¹ In it he says that it was only in the midst of his own suffering that he saw that God suffers deeply. He reflects on the old believe that no one can behold God's face and live. "I always thought" Wolterstorff said, "that this meant that no one could see God's splendor and live. A friend said perhaps it means that no one could see God's sorrow and live...or perhaps the sorrow is the splendor." One of the names for Jesus is the man of sorrows. He had found the deep in his sorrow.

Proverbs says that "the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom." It is the moment of choice when we are confronted with our fears, and the opportunity to step forward in faith. The exhaustion of the pandemic and the need to take another step in the right direction. The choice to dig deeper, to be alive to the Holy Spirit's work in the world. To let down our nets again, even if we're tired of fishing all night and coming up with nothing. Or whatever equivalent of that is happening in your life this week.

I wonder if you know what blessings are below the surface, if you can imagine what abundance is being prepared, if you believe that love extends to each of you from this God, who meets us where we are, as we are, and calls us...

Do not be afraid, so much is available...

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 Congregational Church in South Glastonbury
 949 Main St.
 South Glastonbury, CT 06073

¹ *Lament for a Son*, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Eerdmans 1987