

St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Anchorage, Alaska.  
Message from Rev. Israel Portilla-Gómez, Associate Rector. February 09, 2025  
Third Sunday after Epiphany. Scripture readings: Isaiah 6:1-8, (9-13); Psalm 138; 1  
Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in your sight, O lord, My strength and my redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)*

Today's gospel passage is known as The Miraculous Catch of Fish. While the sudden and overwhelming number of fish is striking, I want to highlight something else that is also wonderful: it is trust. The miracle is possible because Peter trusted Jesus.

He trusted Jesus when it was absurd to trust. I invite you to imagine the scene: you are a fisherman; you arrive at the shore of the lake after working all night without catching anything. And you see an unknown man preaching on the beach, to people who have come



James Tissot. *The Miraculous Draught of Fishes*. 1886–1896. Brooklyn Museum.

to buy fish that you did not catch. Ok, you go to wash your nets. Minutes later, you see this unknown preacher inside your boat asking you to put out a little away from the shore. So, now you do not know when you can leave, and you must listen to the preaching. You do not know how long it will be because the custom was that people asked questions. Let's say, for brevity, it could be about an hour and a half. After that, no coffee, no donuts. Can you imagine Simon Peter in that situation?

Then, Jesus tells him: "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch."

First, Peter must have been tired, frustrated that he had nothing to take home, and sleepy; also, he had already washed his nets and called it a day. He had been up all night trying to fish, enduring the hardships of being outdoors, exposed to wind and rain.

Second, I imagine Peter had many doubts, even thinking that Jesus was naïve. It was the first time Peter had met Jesus, and the only words he had heard from him were those he had preached some minutes ago.

Third, Jesus was not a fisherman; in a way, a stranger was giving instructions to Peter, who had dedicated his whole life to fishing and knew that lake like the back of his hand. Besides, going fishing again

was another uncertainty because he would not know how long it could take or if the fishing would be successful. I'm going to speculate, but I sincerely believe that Simon Peter was thinking: You have to be kidding me.

That is why Peter says to Jesus: "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing."

Peter's answer did not end there. He made the effort to believe in Jesus, to trust him, so he added: "Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." It is like, Master, hear me well; I am doing this only because you are saying it. If not, I am not wasting my time.

What happened later? Peter saw as many fish as he had ever seen in his entire life, so he had to call for help from the other boat. But there were so many fish that the boats began to sink.

In their maximum expression, Peter must have gone through astonishment, fear, bewilderment, joy, and many other emotions. Thus, we can understand Peter's exaggerated and emotional reaction when "he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!'"

Jesus answered him, "Do not be afraid, from now on you will be catching people."

So began this movement of Jesus, under somewhat risky conditions, because Luke tells us that when they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him. Can you imagine Peter coming home with the biggest number of fish he had ever caught, and at the same time, telling his wife: — Love, I will not be a fisherman anymore! — What? — I found a powerful preacher, and I am following him. — OK, what are you going to do? — Catch people.

I'm sure Peter didn't have any idea what catching people really meant. Same for James and John. There may have been lengthy conversations with their families that day.

Here, I want to emphasize something relevant. For Jesus, this was not a random event. There was a plan. Peter, James, and John were from Bethsaida, which is located north of the lake, that is, the farthest part of the lake from Nazareth. Let us remember that in the Gospel two weeks ago, people tried to throw Jesus down over the cliff. So, He must have walked over Bethsaida's shore for about 12 hours because the text implies that he did not have a boat, which is why he used Peter's boat.

Just as happened with his disciples in this text, it does with us. If you are here, it is not by chance but because you have heard and trusted Jesus' call. The difference between the disciples and us is that we already know what it is all about.

In his powerful sermon last week, Rev. Michael invited us to continue our deepest connection to our mission and vision as Christians. A community that embraces Jesus' core values: love, mercy, compassion, truth, justice, and forgiveness. Do not be afraid, no matter how intimidating the world outside may be. Let us trust in Jesus as Peter trusted in him. It has never been easy, and it doesn't have to be. But there is fulfillment in following Jesus, better than any other offer. Let's trust Him. Amen.