THE ORIGINAL CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

A Sermon Delivered February 6, 2022

Luke 5:1-11 “They Caught So Many Fish” Isaiah 6:1-8 “God Calls Isaiah”

***The Big Catch***

I want to tell you the story of a magical place. It’s clean, cold, and open during Covid. It’s a fish wholesaler that serves many restaurants and seafood purveyors. And, it has a retail section for the neighbors. They have everything! It’s affectionately known as “Big Catch.”

At Big Catch you can get:

Halibut, Haddock and Hard-shell Lobster.

Coconut, Carolina and Fresh Colossal Shrimp.

Eastpoint, Bluepoint and Cedar Point Oysters.

Weakfish, Whitefish and Smoked Whiting.

Snapper, Smelts and Frozen Squid Rings.

Frozen Backfin Crabmeat and Escargot in Butter.

Butterfish, Blue Fish and Frozen Barramundi.

Striped Sea Bass, Black Sea Bass and Fresh Chilean Sea Bass.

Tuna, Tilapia, Trigger, Tile and Trout.

Frozen Calamari Tubes & Tentacles.

Little Neck, Middle Neck and Top Neck Clams.

Live Crab, Soft Shell Crab, Dungeness, Snow and King Crab Legs.

Lump Meat, Claw Meat and Frozen Jonah Crabmeat.

Live Lobster, Frozen Lobster Tail and Lobster Mac & Cheese.

Scallops, Swordfish and Fresh Scottish Salmon.

Mako, Monkfish and Mahi Mahi.

Fluke, Flounder and Fresh Squid.

Octopus, Frog Legs and Gator Meat…

I could go on but you get the point of my illustration. Big Catch carries over 1,000 items!

Fresh and frozen fish and from the seas all around the world. That’s a Big Catch!

In the Sea of Galilee they have Tilapia. Today it’s called Saint Peter’s Fish. At the Galei Gill Restaurant in Tiberias Israel you can get the grilled Tilapia with a wedge of lemon and roasted potatoes. Delicious and affordable. Four and a half stars. And in a time before Google, Twitter, and Cable News, Jesus knew what he was doing.

Without big media, a big catch makes for great box office. Imagine the roar of the crowds when Peter and his fishing crew the Sons of Zebedee came back to shore. Their boats were so full they almost sank. It was the big catch. The Zebedees were happy. The seafood purveyors were happy. The hungry crowds were happy. How did it happen?

Well, it’s all about Jesus they say. He comes to town and is just standing by the shore. The crowds start pressing in on him to hear the Word. So he spies the fishing boats and quick jumps aboard and says, “put out a little ways.” Jesus sure knew how to find his lens. Later he tells Peter “Put out to deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” Peter was full of excuses. “We worked all night and got nothing. The fish must be on the other side.” Jesus never was moved by excuses. He helped others find their lens too.

Peter let down the nets. They caught so many fish the nets were beginning to break. The boats were full. It was a big catch. But what did it mean? The big catch was an industry milestone and crowd pleaser for sure, but it symbolized all the people Peter and the Sons of Zebedee would catch if they kept following Jesus, their miracle fish finder.

Jesus invites them to follow him. At Big Catch the motto is “Bringing Fresh Fish to Life.” For Jesus, the big message to get out far and wide was “Catching People to Life.” There was a lot of saving to be done and the fishing crew was up to the task. Following the Lord’s call to faith and service is very rewarding but is also very demanding. It requires sacrifice, risk taking and a thick skin. Not every crowd will be wowed by your words and deeds. One must be confident in the conviction that God is transforming lives.

What does Peter say at the big catch? “Go away from me Lord for I am a sinful man.” Jesus takes him anyway. What did the prophet Isaiah say to the messengers of God singing “Holy, Holy, Holy?” He said, “Oh woe is me! I am lost! I have unclean lips and I live among people who speak nothing but ungodly filth and lies.” God takes him too.

The seraphs, bird like creatures, swoop in and taking up a pair of tongs, hold a live coal to the soon to be prophet’s lips. His sin is cauterized. His shortcomings are blotted out. He no longer has any excuses before the Lord. He says, “Here I am; send me!” We all would do well to follow in the example of Peter and the Prophet. Acknowledge that our cultural milieu can distract us from recognizing the holy in our midst. Our weakness, vulnerability and bad happenstance is exactly the stuff that Seraphs speak to.

If we are so high and mighty we can’t reach the lowly. If we are so full of our own earthly wisdom we can’t gain an ounce of wisdom from above. If our boats are so full of our own stuff, we can’t provide for anyone else. Jesus came for the big catch. The big catch is that everyone deserves life and life in abundance. It’s how the sea works. There is plenty for all. Put out to the deep! It’s time to let down the nets. Let’s go fishing for and with people! *May the Lord summons you to put out to the deep and bring in the Big Catch of a lifetime! Amen.*