



Getting to Shore

Luke 5:1-11

Larry DeLong

February 7, 2010

It's good to be back! The conference week before last on larger church evangelism was terrific; the effects of it will ripple out over the next few months. Florida was a nice place to visit, but I'm glad we live in Arizona!

The seafood was the best I've ever eaten. I've not always been that big on fish, generally, but I did discover I do like grouper. Of course, it *was* beautifully prepared.

Still, beautifully prepared fresh fish is a very long way from the fish we read about in the Bible. They ate an awful lot of fish, Jesus and his disciples, most of it salted and dried. Thinking about Peter's catch this morning brings to mind a mess of sardines or those dried fish hanging from the rafters of an Italian grocery – not all that appealing. But those overstretched nets that Peter and his friends struggled with have everything to do with our message. Fish was food, and food was hard to come by...so think of something you really love, and imagine more than you can handle of it. Something like chocolate.

The Food Network on TV has a show called "Unwrapped", where they show how various packaged or processed foods are made, including candy. It's a treat to watch chocolate-covered things being chocolate-covered: almost always, the thing to be covered is placed on a wire conveyor belt, and has to pass through a waterfall of chocolate, which is how it gets bathed in sweetness. So, you've got rows of things like Mounds or Almond Joys all trundling along, and like the Maid of the Mist at Niagara Falls, they sail right through a curtain of chocolate running over, around, and beside them.

Picture that, for a moment: a river of chocolate pouring down. Probably ten or more times what actually coats the candy flows right on past, through the gaps in the conveyor, and right back into the machine, and gets cycled back for another try. What that does is ensure that every piece gets a complete coating, but it also means that there's a lot more

chocolate flowing in the process than what's needed for just those pieces. That's a lot of chocolate – more than many of us eat in a year.

In today's lesson, Jesus is on the shore of Lake Gennesaret, and sees the crowds are too big for him just to stand around and talk to them. If he did that, only the first few layers of people could see him, and the ones behind would jostle around, too, trying to get closer, and the whole thing would end up being just a crowd. So Jesus has Peter (and this is pre-disciple, workingman Peter) take him out in his fishing boat, which forces everyone into some sort of order along the shoreline; now they're a little bit elevated, sort of like a theater, and people can see him better. He can sit down, too.

But then, after he's finished teaching, Jesus does something more: he has Peter do a little fishing. Peter doesn't want to; they've fished all night without any results, but tosses his net in anyway.

Peter catches more fish in his nets than he and his comrades can even get into the boat. They have to call in the second boat and crew, and even then, both boats are nearly swamped, they're carrying so much. It clearly was a major struggle to get their cargo back to the shore, where you can be sure the crowd that was listening to Jesus was ready to put them to good use. They probably already had a dozen fires going!

My point is this: just like Jesus did for Peter, just like that candy machine does for the chocolate, God does for all of us – pours out grace and love and forgiveness and peace and anything else good you can think of. Just tons of it, on each one of us; enough, like those bursting nets, for a whole crowd. Our challenge is in two parts: one, to identify those good things, and two, getting them to shore. After all, a bunch of fish in a net out in the lake just *is*. You have to bring it to shore to eat them.

Just like those men in the boats, just like those little Almond Joys facing that river of chocolate in the factory, we are overwhelmed, covered with an overflowing wave of God's gifts. But where? How do we see them? That's something that Jesus himself helps us with. Remember that Peter and his crew had been fishing all night without catching a thing. While Jesus was teaching, they were floating there with no clue those fish were there, right under the boat, waiting patiently for Jesus to tell Peter to cast his nets. God's gifts may be waiting for you to realize they're there, too.

Sure, we already experience some of them. I hope that you will agree that worship here on Sunday is a wonderful thing, something that picks you up and polishes you up, puts a gleam in your eye and a spring in your step, at least figuratively. Have you ever thought about it that way?

But even if you do feel energized here in church on Sunday, does that feeling really last? For too many of us, too often we leave what we've experienced here in this building behind; we take this huge gift of God, whittle it down to pocket-size, and then put it away with our Sunday shoes, like the bulletin. We may not even think about God the whole rest of the week!

Getting God's gifts to shore means taking them out into the rest of the week, put to use in every part of our existence. Those nets full of fish were too much for one time, one – even a dozen! – people; the miracle cried out to be spread around, not just to other people, but for days to come. Those nets of fish were no good out in the lake; they had to be brought to land, where people could cook and eat them. That river of chocolate only makes our mouths water if it stays in the machine. The gifts of God, what we learn, what we experience here, has to get out into our “regular” lives for the Holy Spirit to make them grow.

Instead of putting today's bulletin on the dresser or in the trash, try going back and reading the Scripture lessons again at home. Sit down for a while, and think about what they say. Close your eyes, and think back at where God has entered your life, where you've sense his presence – this morning, last week, ten years ago. And pray.

It doesn't have to be some great flowery language; it can just be “thanks, God,” or “Lord, I'm thinking about Edith and her family. Give them peace.” And then do it again tomorrow, and the next day.

God's overflowing love surrounds us, and we *can* bring it to shore, feel it every day. It's about living our church-life as our real life, about getting rid of the distinction between how we act and think and feel here in worship and there, in our homes and everywhere else. It's not that God is stingy, only giving out so much, so that we might run out of what he's giving; we're already getting more than we know, and there's plenty more where that came from.