

The Master's Plan for Fishing

✦ impossible odds (vv.1-7)

✦ fearless relief (vv.8-11)

In the Name of Jesus our shining Epiphany Lord and Master, dearly beloved disciples:

It was one of my favorite sermon introductions, though quite painful to confess among so many Minnesotans. You'd understand if you grew up where it rained all the time and lakes never froze. The thought of driving a car on a lake – no way! Sitting on a frozen bucket or even in a fish house? Not on your "bucket list." When I launched into my "Oregon boy's view of ice fishing," so many years ago, there was a stir in the congregation. Didn't know why until shaking hands, one woman leaned in close. "I didn't know where you were going with that, Pastor. I just bought my husband an ice fishing vacation, and tomorrow's his birthday." Then one of the young men informed me, "You didn't realize this, Pastor, but yesterday was our annual ice fishing. About a dozen of us were out there freezing in the wind." What would pro-fisherman Peter think? Ah, but this is **The Master's Plan for Fishing** – against...

✦ impossible odds (vv.1-7)

The Sea of Galilee, also called "*the Lake of Gennesaret,*" made a natural amphitheater for Jesus to push away from the crowds and preach across the waters. It's quite beautiful on the north shore where the people sat on a hillside with Jesus out in the boat. Jesus found Peter and his brother Andrew washing their nets from that failed night of fishing and mending them in hopes of better "luck" next time.

This wasn't the first time Peter and Andrew, or their partner brothers James and John, had met Jesus. John's Gospel account gives their exciting first look at Jesus when John the Baptist pointed out Jesus and said, "**Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!**" (John 1:29-42 EHV¹) Remember how they asked Jesus where He was staying? He replied, "**Come, and you will see.**" That was when Andrew introduced his brother Peter to Jesus as the Messiah. Our Lord and Master was preparing these fisherman for the day when He'd call them as apostles into a ministry against **impossible odds**.

Doesn't it seem like fishing frustration increases the more you know about it? Maybe it depends on who's along? A pastor friend felt fried when he took us out with our grandson and came back empty. I tried to warn him about the invisible, silent beacon all good fish seem to hear whenever I'm on the water. One friend ran a bait shop and worked as a guide on the Mississippi. "I'll get you into fish," he promised one bright Sunday afternoon. Well, the fish must have had a conference. "Let's have some fun with this guy. I imagine they called little Herbert. 'You're up!'" It was the only "bite" I had all afternoon. My line dangling as we pulled away to find a better spot, this tiny little fish jumped at my bait.

Now tell a professional like Peter after no fish all night, "**Put out into the deep water, and let down your nets for a catch.**" You can still see men fishing with nets on Galilee, but they're all along the shore in shallow water. **Simon answered him, "Master, we worked hard all through the night and caught nothing."** For most that would end the discussion. "I'm going home to get some sleep!" But here's the first **impossible odds** miracle. Peter agreed! "**But at your word I will let down the nets.**"

Ever feel like your Christian life is fruitless? How discouraging, whatever it is, when you've worked so hard and seem to have nothing to show for it. You can't always just put your poles away and

¹ EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version* (<http://wartburgproject.org>) © 2019. NPH: 800-662-6022, Amazon-Kindle, LOGOS.

go do something else. Loved ones are straying. Hearts are hurting. They need Jesus! So do you! When the **odds** seem most **impossible**, Jesus goes to work on **The Master's Plan for Fishing**.

So what's the real problem that keeps us from serving with our Savior? Is it fear of failure or embarrassment that leaves us in silence when we should speak up? Is it a kind of professional arrogance? "I already know all this. I've heard this before." So we don't listen to Jesus' invitation to His disciples to learn and relearn **The Master's Plan for Fishing**? "I've tried already! I'm too tired! I did my best and...nothing!" At least Peter listened and let down the nets again in spite of **impossible odds**.

✦ **fearless relief (vv.8-11)**

Jesus is God the Creator. You can't hear all the commands the Creator gives to His creatures, like the silent word of God to angels. So did Jesus tell all the fish, "Head out to the deep water and wait there"? I don't know, but God sure gave it up for Peter and friends. Out there in the deep ***"they caught a great number of fish, and their nets were about to tear apart. They signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink."***

How do you feel when the Creator opens the floodgates of heaven and pours out more blessings than you have room for? (Malachi 3:10 NIV84) Most of us can relate to the way Peter felt. Maybe someone notices you have a beautiful new car, so you feel guilty as if you have to explain what a great deal you got on it. Or like a man in Shoreview with a beautiful boat in his driveway, going guilty when I admired it. "Wait!" I said. "That's a gift from God. He wants you to enjoy it. Just give God the thanks and praise."

What trips us up is our tiny faith going into a challenge or a crisis. Too impatient with people we love. Failing a test our Lord and Master has given us. He's never trying to break us, not wanting to cause us pain. We're so slow to learn and quick to forget. Can you relate to Peter's deep disappointment? He blurted out, ***"Go away from me, because I am a sinful man, Lord."***

You know that God always answers prayer. Sometimes, "Yes!" Sometimes, "Wait." Sometimes as with Peter here, "I've got a better idea." Thank God for **The Master's Plan** that always wants to give more than we can ask or imagine. Our solutions can be disastrous. But God always does right.

It was right for Peter to cry out to the Lord in his guilt and fear. The Lord always listens and hears the broken heart. And yet the Lord has promised, ***"Never will I leave you never will I forsake you."*** (Hebrews 13:5 NIV84) And the Lord's Apostle Paul wrote, ***"I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** (Romans 8:38f NIV84) Rather ***"as far as the east is from the west so far has the room removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him."*** (Psalm 103:12f NIV84)

Remember what the first human, Adam, said to the LORD God while hiding in the Garden? ***"I was afraid."*** The rest of the Bible is God's awesome kindness relieving our fears. Each time He says, ***"Do not be afraid,"*** the LORD is launching into the deep wonders of His loving kindness and tender mercy. Your guilt is washed clean in the blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Then God gives you work to do in His kingdom of grace. ***"Have no fear. From now on you will be catching people."*** That's **The Master's Plan for Fishing against all odds with fearless relief**. Not just pastors and missionaries, but all Jesus' disciples are grateful that He opened heaven wide for sinners all. After Peter and his partners ***brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.*** The same Good News Gospel that relieves your guilt and fear also gives you strength and courage to follow Jesus boldly wherever He leads. Whatever "luck" you thought you needed on a frozen bucket or a sunny Sunday afternoon, the Creator-Savior's skill and blessing says, "You catch 'em; I'll clean 'em." Amen.