

Once while Jesus was standing beside the Lake of Gennesaret and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, ² he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets. ³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. ⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” ⁵ Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” ⁶ When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to burst. ⁷ So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’s knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” ⁹ For he and all who were with him were astounded at the catch of fish that they had taken, ¹⁰ and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” ¹¹ When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Many years ago, I was brought to Pennsylvania to meet my partner’s amazing family and be introduced to the Amish and Mennonite culture. Now, no one in the family is Amish or Mennonite, but to live in Lancaster County, PA is to be transported into a Pennsylvania Dutch lifestyle. Horses and buggies are on the roads. There are parking spots for the horses and buggies in retail parking lots. There are roadside produce stands where you pay on the honor system, one-room schoolhouses, and fields of corn and tobacco and soybeans as far as the eyes can see. Though the Amish don’t use them, many Pennsylvania sheds and barns have circular signs on them called hex signs with symbols painted on them, similar to what a medieval coat of arms would have on it. The culture of the area is everywhere.

My favorite part about the Pennsylvania Dutch culture is the food. It's comforting and rich and fresh, and there's one place you can go where you can get absolutely everything you could imagine to eat. That place is called the Shady Maple Smorgasbord – the biggest buffet in the good ol' US of A.

Imagine a building big enough to seat one thousand two hundred people around dinner tables. Imagine a two hundred foot long, double-sided buffet line. There are forty-six unique salad bar options, half a dozen freshly baked breads, eight different pies, six cakes, and THIRTEEN other dessert options and also the ice cream sundae bar. Every night there's turkey and stuffing. Every night there's fish, and barbeque chicken, ham, and pot roast. Oh, and every night, they have specials like steak, prime rib, brisket, or seafood on the grill that they cook and carve up right in front of you.

The abundance is overwhelming. You can tell who the first-time diners are because they're just stunned, and they clog up the aisle looking around, not sure where to go next. But now, I'm a pro. I've probably been about ten times. I've got a system down. Ignore the mile long salad bar. Get small scoops of things. Go to the grill, even if there's a line – because it's worth it, and you unashamedly save room for desserts, plural.

Then, after dinner, if you can still walk, you can go downstairs and leisurely look at the 40,000 square foot general store.

The abundance is overwhelming.

But it's not just Shady Maple that's overwhelming. It's life. In recent days, the speed of the breaking news, and the content of that news, has been overwhelming. My sister posted something the other day that I have adopted as my new definition of how I'm doing. It was simply the word *exhausterwhelmulated* which means: an adjective. The feeling of being exhausted overwhelmed and overstimulated." *Exhausterwelmulated*.

Some of you may feel this way. You see, sometimes the abundance is overwhelming in a great way and sometimes in a not-so-great way.

Here at Dunn's Corners, we have abundance that is overwhelming. I see this church in our scripture today. The church is Peter, also called Simon at this point. For many years, the church has been faithfully working away. Keeping the church building maintained, worshipping every Sunday, up at long hours of the night for session meetings and trustee meetings and deacon meetings and choir practice and bell practice. You worked through COVID. You worked through the surprising announcement that the previous pastor was leaving. You worked through the interim. And you were so steadfast and consistent. You kept the church going. Just like Peter kept his fishing business going. His nets needed to be mended. Storms came and went. Competition came and went. Backs hurt. Helpers moved on, but he was always out there on the water, fishing.

But almost overnight, things have changed. In the last few months, the pews are filling up and the children are squirming in them like fish out of water. Laughter is abundant and the offering plates have been surprisingly full. There have been calls sent out from one church member to others, "Come and help! I need you! The abundance is overwhelming!"

There is much to be excited about. We're calling our friends and neighbors and saying, "Come and see what's going on here!"

The calendar is full of activities. Cribbage night was such a hit, that it's back on the calendar again for this Friday. Amanda is pivoting with the children's ministry. Instead of planning for 3 children, she's planning for 12 to 15. Michael's planning a youth lock-in and setting a date for a summer trip to either Montreat or Massanetta. The bell choir has an awesome problem of having more people wanting to ring than parts in a bell choir piece, and the children will join them next week in a special piece where they can make a joyful noise! The abundance is overwhelming!

And, friends, this is exciting. For two years, the trustees and session have had to present to the congregation a deficit budget. We anticipated that we would spend more than we received. We've had to draw from reserve funds to pay bills, but this year, we have a balanced budget again.

The abundance is overwhelming.

Jesus is doing a new thing here. He's taking the same fishermen and the same boat and saying, watch this. You've been steady and faithful, and now Jesus is going to do some special things with this church and the metaphorical nets are stretching under the weight of the blessings.

But if this scripture text tells us anything, it's that . . . you also have to be prepared. From the moment Jesus stepped onto Simon's boat, Simon was never the same. His name changed. His job changed. His family dynamics changed.

He went from being the steady worker to becoming known as the impulsive, slow-witted disciple. At one point he was called out by Jesus because he suggested that Jesus should do things the easy way. At one point, he denied knowing Jesus, and at one point, he wept bitterly because of his mistakes. From the moment that Simon Peter experienced the abundance of the catch, things drastically shifted.

I want you to take a moment to pause and think. Right now, our church's nets are filling up. For those of you who have worked for years at this church, your tired bodies and minds are excited and grateful . . . and overwhelmed. Those of you in particular who have kept the boat afloat have said to me, "this is amazing." "Things are changing so quickly." "There are so many new faces." And you're rightfully excited.

And those of you who are new, you're exciting. You are the metaphorical fish that are straining our nets, and I mean that in the nicest way possible.

But I want all of you to hear this. Change, even the positive change of abundance, can be overwhelming. Change can be scary. The abundance is the best kind of problem to have. It's better than scarcity or stagnation, for sure. But this is the time, and now is the moment, to do what Peter did. Acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and as the one who has provided the abundance. And then, be ready to follow Jesus. Jesus didn't say, "Thank you, for letting me use your boat. Keep fishing this same spot each day in the same way and at the same time, and you'll keep catching a full net." He didn't say, "I will bless your work and you will be known as the best fishermen on the lake and your business will grow and you'll own 14 boats and have a crew of 40 people and become an entrepreneur."

He said, first of all, “Do not be afraid.” Who would be afraid? This was an exciting, awesome miracle, right? Super exciting. Not scary, except for the part about the boats nearly sinking under the weight of the fish, but that’s the part I love about the Bible. It’s real. Miracles can be both exciting and joyful and happy, and also scary at the same time.

Reverend Chelsea Harmon writes, “Might we also consider that Peter is afraid because he is overwhelmed with the goodness of God? [In an earlier story, he’s] seen Jesus heal his mother-in-law and countless others, he’s heard Jesus cast out demons and preach the good news to a crowd, and now he’s witnessed Jesus command nature to produce a bounty for him and his colleagues. Glory as goodness, overflowing [and also scary].”

Peter says, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!”

Realizing that God is working, right in front of your very eyes, can be startling, but again, it’s a good problem, isn’t it? Why be so nervous?

I want to be real with you all for a moment and admit something, and I realize this sounds crazy to some people, but I’ve been overwhelmed by the abundance and nervous about how well things have been going. The last six months have been beyond spectacular at the church, and at the same time, part of me worries that the bar has been set unsustainably high. How can we keep this momentum up? What happens if we don’t have a balanced budget next year? What happens if we don’t have 16 new members? Or if I have three boring sermons in a row?

And I’m also telling the staff, and I want you to hear this, too, that I’m not afraid of failure. That we are going to have to try new things and in doing so, we’ll find success and we’ll have programs that flop, but I want you all to hear me say, I am not afraid of failure as long as we’re trying. I’d rather try and fail than stick with the familiar things that used to work, but might have outgrown their usefulness now.

As we grow together, we will fail from time to time. It’s nothing to be ashamed of. We shouldn’t resist trying new things out of a fear of failure. We have new people, in a new era, with new passions and resources. We cannot and will not just try to replicate what has

worked in the past. We must be imaginative and curious and humble. And that means there will be times that we fail.

Peter failed. From the moment he left his nets behind, he was known as a foolish disciple. Impulsive and stubborn and not the brightest crayon in the box. He put his foot in his mouth more often than all the other disciples combined.

But he kept trying, and that's why he eventually got the keys to the kingdom. That must have been overwhelming, too.

So, Gin, so Dunn's Corners, so session and trustees and deacons and staff - do not be afraid of this moment. Do not be afraid of the abundance or the inevitable change. Do not be afraid to put down what you have known and venture out into something completely new. Do not be afraid to adapt or to fail. If our goal is to follow Jesus as closely as possible, we cannot stay with the boat, we have to follow Jesus whose grace and love is overwhelmingly abundant. Amen.