My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us pray. Our God of our hearts, minds, spirits, and souls, God of our dreams and hopes and possibilities for justice, peace, compassion, and mercy, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts always be acceptable in your sight, our strength and our redeemer, Amen.

On summer weekends when I was growing up, we often went camping in the mountains of Colorado. My father would load up the station wagon and we had a small pop-up trailer, and if the campgrounds were full, my dad would often pull into an impossibly dense grove of trees and somehow find enough headroom for the trailer to pop up to its full height of 8 feet. We didn’t go camping for the scenery. We went there to fish.

I could tell you that I once caught a fish THIS BIG, the one about the really big one that got away, the trout that would put the Old Man and the Sea to shame. But our Bible tells a different kind of story, where our carpenter commandeers a boat, preaches a sermon, and then proceeds to tell the fishermen where the fish are. The nets are full. They quit their jobs and follow Jesus.

This fishing story isn’t about boasting big fish. It’s not about what kind of bait or lures catch the best ones. The reason why this story matters if it teaches us why some folks don’t catch fish.

Most folks know that the big schools of fish are in the deeper water, and when you go fishing, you go where the fish are. But this story isn’t about filling the nets with fish, is it? Jesus is teaching spiritual principles. Like most things biblical we’re talking metaphor. What are the metaphors here? (take all answers).

Right, we could substitute fish for abundance of mercy, justice, wisdom, or peace, healing, compassion. We want alllllll these things in abundance. But some of us won’t catch these things because we don’t go deep.

So now here we go. The deep water is where the fish congregate in numbers unimaginable. Deep water takes faith. Deep water is where the abundance begins. Deep water is a risk, because as much as we could get a lot of catch, we could also lose everything if we’re not focusing our mind and heart on the tasks at hand, if we don’t do it patiently, softly, gently, slowly. Fishing’s hard.

And if you’ve noticed when you come up on a deep pool of water, the water darkens considerably. In the deep, we have to trust the words and promises of others who have also gone and fished there about their experience there. The ones who have done it can help us through it. Its how fishing has been taught through the generations. Jesus has always invited people to fish the deep end of things.

In the deep, we can’t see the bottom, like we can in friendly little brooks and streams or near the shore under the dock, where the little fish swim. The shallows are nice, the water only comes up to our knees and there’s little fish that will nip your toes. It’s cooling on the feet and soul to stay in the shallow water.

But shallow water doesn’t take a lot of courage or risk. You can catch a million little minnows and they won’t feed you much less your family. Simon knew that the shallow water no longer yielded a catch that could sustain his life, for they had caught nothing all night, and remember, these are the professional fishermen. What we say we want isn’t in the shallows, it’s in the deep.

The shallow, however, is where we begin the adventure. We learn about the Bible in church and we open our eyes to the understand how much of the world needs giving and service. We begin to see that much of the world is steeped in Biblical references. Sacrifice. Redemption. Persecution. Justice. Salvation.

We see that the deep water may be where we have to go to find more, to figure out not just the signs and the little nibbles of faith, but to find out what God has for us in this life, right here, right now.

Some of us won’t catch fish because we don’t expect to catch fish. Jesus tells Simon let’s go to the deep water, and prepare for a catch. Why do we resist that? What is keeping us from trying to go to the deep water and prepare for a catch? Do we think God’s blessing is going to be delivered on the portico as we go out today because we showed up here out of habit? God wants more than that when he invites us to the other side of the boat.

Expectation is the child of faith. “The substance of things hoped for”, says the Bible. When we say we believe in God, what are we really doing? We’re not saying we have some abstract idea of a man in the sky. What we’re saying is that we expect the things that God has promised for us. We’re saying that we’re partners in every good gift that God gives, fruitfulness of vine, and fish that come because God continually shows us the deep water.

Jesus keeps pushing Simon, the one who doesn’t fully trust and believe. “Leave the shore, Simon; deeper.” What Jesus was saying is “Expect a blessing, Simon”. Jesus is calling Simon to risk being disappointed in God. Rather than meet his own meager expectations of small fish that will only meet his needs once in a while, Jesus bids us go to where so much more is possible.

Some folks won’t catch fish because they know more about fish than God. We all fall into this trap, right? It’s not that we actually think we know it all. We just behave that way. We hear God’s instructions: Forgive always. Bless those who curse you. Give abundantly. Mercy to the poor, migrant, and prisoner. Love your neighbor. Oh, and remember the Sabbath.

But we ignore Gods invitations to deep abundance. We say to God by our actions that we know more about marriage, healing, forgiveness, children, money, and relationships than you do, God. And Simon forgot this, too, that God is God. But he was able to overcome allll of that hubris and learn again that humility is the ultimate teacher if we are ready.

I’ll leave you with these final thoughts.

You might think the net full of fish is the miracle here. But maybe the miracle is letting go, Simon deciding God is God and that he would begin living that way immediately.

My frustration is real, Lord. My pain is real. My emptiness, real. My despair is real, Lord; you are God. I am not. Only at that point is when God says, “okay, I have your attention”.

Some folks won’t catch fish because they don’t expect to, and some folks won’t catch fish because they can’t go deep for fear of…well, there we go. The most common phrase Jesus says is what? Be not afraid, or fear not. And yet we can’t go there.

Not everyone who comes to church is ready to go deep, and that’s okay. The shallows are needed to get used to being in the water at all. But very many of us, over time, will go deep, and it just might be okay to trust friends and neighbors you’ve known all your life to jump in with them.

Thanks be to God, Amen.