My 4 year old granddaughter Soleil was reporting to me that she and her Daddy went fishing. I thought that was pretty neat, and she was very excited. I was reminded of when her Daddy, my son Joe was 5 years old and his grandfather took him fishing for the first time. Mary’s father was an avid fisherman, and Joe was so excited to fish with Grandpa Wally. When they got home, with a nice little mess of bluegills Joe told me all about it. “We were in the boat, and I would fish from one side and grandpa from the other side, and then we would sit and be patient and quiet. Then Grandpa Wally would say, ‘Joe, I’m not having any luck on this side of the boat do you want to switch poles, and we would switch poles and then I caught a fish. And then we would wait and then switch poles again and I would catch another one. You know Dad that I caught almost every fish except for one and grandpa said I was the best fisherman he had ever fished with.” I remember looking at Wally and he gave me a knowing wink.

The disciples were fishermen, I mean that is what they did before they met Jesus, they fished for a living. And after Jesus was crucified they didn’t know what else to do with themselves so Peter announced that he was going fishing. So a half dozen other disciples including James, John, Thomas and 3 others climbed into their boat and rowed a couple of hundred yards from shore and began casting their nets. They had no luck, they fished all night and caught nary a fish, not even a minnow.

As day was breaking a fellow called to them from the shore. He said, you catchin any? Havin any luck. To which they replied, no, not a single fish. So he said, cast your nets on the other side of the boat, the right side this time, and see if that helps. So they did, and lo and
behold they caught so many fish they weren’t able to haul them all in. The nets were almost breaking so plentiful was the catch and so big were fish.

Well it didn’t take them long to realize that the guy on the shore wasn’t just any old guy inquiring whether or not the fish were biting. This was Jesus himself, risen and alive. Peter was so excited when John figured out that it was Jesus and told him he couldn’t wait for the boat to get to the shore so he dove in and swam there. Then around a campfire, they shared a meal, a breakfast of bread and fish and they all knew that it was Jesus who ate with them and whose wisdom had led them to all those fish.

A great story, one of the best post resurrection stories of John. But this story has a deeper meaning, it is not just about catching fish. It is about the disciples following the original call of Jesus to them. You remember, he calls them away from their nets and their boats and says, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people, fishers of men.” This is the next part of that call of Jesus to his disciples. It won’t be long, just a few weeks and the church gets its start, because a motley group of fishermen took this call seriously.

It is our call as well, always has been. The church is all about casting a wide net and attracting as many peoples as possible. The problem is that sometimes we tend to fish off the wrong side of the boat. Like the disciples we try hard, we cast those nets and gather them in and stay up all night trying, but the simple fact is we don’t have the success we desire. We don’t attract near as many folks as we had hoped to, inspite of our best efforts.

There may be reasons for this. Sometimes the fishing spot we choose is fished out. If that is so, then we have to be willing to move the boat a little further out. Sometimes we use the wrong bait, people are attracted to the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Good News of salvation
and hope for the world, and when we stray from that message folks tend to tune us out. And sometimes we fish off the wrong side of the boat.

We tend to want to attract folks who are just like us. I mean that is the easiest and most comfortable way to be a disciple. There is nothing inherently wrong with that, as a matter of fact 80% of folks who join a church do so because they were invited by a friend or family member. But there are times when if we are to really follow the call of God in our lives we have to fish in new waters, we have to be willing to cast on the other side of the boat, we have to reach out beyond our comfort range and welcome folks who are new and different.

There is a great wide ocean of people out there, and we need to be willing to cast a wide net and welcome all kinds of folks to our fellowship. The good news is for everyone, not just a chosen few. Jesus is demonstrating to the disciples that they have to be open and accepting and willing to change if they are to have success at catching fish, or people.

Soleil was so excited about fishing with her Dad and she told me the entire story. “Paca Daddy would put a worm on a hook and then he would cast it out and I would hold the pole and be patient and quiet. Then sometimes he would look over at me and say, Solie, I’m not catching a thing and we would switch poles and then I would feel something and reel it in and there would be a fish. None of them were big enough to keep, but I caught every fish and Daddy never caught a single one and he said I was the best fish catcher ever.

I looked at Joe, he gave me a knowing wink. In closing, a poem, “I pray that I may live to fish until my dying day, and when it comes to my last cast, I then most humbly pray, when in the Lord’s great landing net, and peacefully asleep, that in his mercy I be judged, Big Enough to Keep.