So many times, we get overwhelmed when plans and dreams don’t go our way, and we end up disappointed, perhaps even broken –figuratively and literally. And at such times, some give up and decide to renounce what we were confident was God’s plan for us and stop working altogether for it. And, often, we let the opposition, the intimidation, the confusion, and doubt determined our perception of ourselves and life as a whole: we tell ourselves you are not beautiful, you are not worthy, you are not who you thought you were meant to be. This hurts deeply. To most people, it happens in our 30s and 40s, but it can happen to anyone at any time. Has it happened to you? As a congregation, have you felt like this?

This morning, I am here to tell you that **you are beautiful and worthy, that God has not and will not change his mind about you. What God has told you and said about you is true.** The first and last word over our lives belongs to God, not our problems or our enemies, not our doubts or confusion, not our self-teem or disappointments. It is God who determines the ultimate outcome of our lives.

Today’s message deals with the questions: **Can I trust God when everything seems to be lost or even against me? Can I trust God to have the last word over my life and remain faithful to my calling?**

There is a story in the Bible that will help us to learn about this. Let’s read John 21:1-6,

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will go with you.” They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” They answered him, “No.” He said to them, “Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish.

When John 21:1 says, “After these things…” he refers to what happened in John 20: the tomb having been found empty and the post-resurrection appearances of Christ –first to Mary Magdalene and then to the disciples. John is telling us that sometime “after these things,” something else happened.

What is that? “After these things, Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way.” So, John is telling us that sometime after the events described in John 20, Jesus once again appeared to his disciples, but this time he appeared to them at the Sea of Tiberias—and they did not recognize him

This appearance by Jesus is somewhat surprising because this is not where Jesus told his disciples to wait for him once they arrived in Galilee from Judea. From Matthew 28:16, we get, “Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.”

The disciples, rather than waiting for Jesus at the Sea of Tiberias, were asked, according to Matthew 28:16, to wait for Jesus on a designated mountain. And, this, of course, is not where Jesus found them.

**The question is, *why*? Why were they in a different place? Why were they not waiting where Jesus had given them instructions to do so?** This is a critical part of the story and the teaching of today’s message.

John 21:3 tells us that “Simon Peter said to them, ‘I am going fishing.’ They said to him, ‘We will also come with you.’”

Some people argue that at this point, Peter was giving up on his calling to be a “fisher of people” and went back to his old vocation. It is fair to say that there had to be some doubt, disappointment, and perhaps even resentment. I can almost hear Peter’s thoughts: **“Why would he (Jesus) do this to us? Why did he say all those nice things about us just to leave us here, with nothing? Why did he even bother coming back?”**

This is understandable. He and others may have thought they were better off forgetting the whole thing. Maybe they were meant to be fishermen after all. Perhaps they just had a good run, but it was all over now. So, **Peter heads out to do what he had always done before.**

All of this is very reasonable; we can’t judge or blame Peter and the others for what was happening in their lives. They were going through what no one else had gone through. **They were experiencing the unknown, the never-before-seen kind of deal.** (Can you relate to this?)

Furthermore, even as this story took place after the resurrection, their faith had begun to wear thin. The disciples did return to Galilee but then to go off to the Sea of Tiberias to fish, not to wait for Jesus anymore, **but to start picking up the broken pieces of their lives.**

After this, it gets exciting. What happened then? **They went fishing and caught nothing.** As the skilled fisherman Peter was, the disappointment continued to be compounded with the empty nets. In the words of John, “[T]hat night they caught nothing.” (21:3) This must had been heartbreaking. **Were they good for nothing now?**

I don’t know about you, but I can identify with Peter. I have been down that road before. There have been times in my life when God seemed to be so near, so abundant, so awesome, and there have been other times when God seemed distant and far away—and silent. There have been times when my prayers seemed to yield an immediate, tangible response, and there have been times when they seemed to have gone unanswered altogether, rendering me feeling inadequate and incomplete—just like Peter and the others were probably feeling.

So, yes, I am Peter too. I can identify with him and the others and relate to the anguish they must have felt as they reluctantly let go of the seemingly unfulfilled promises, hopes, and dreams of their life with Jesus and how tried to go back to what they had known all of their lives—only soon to realize that there was not much left to go back to, that **they couldn’t go back to what they were because they couldn’t be that anymore for they had changed.**

The disciples were in the tension between two worlds: **the end of the old and the beginning of the new one.** But to them, I am sure it didn’t feel like that, but just the end.

Does this speak to you? Is it relatable? Have you been in-between what it was and what it will be? This is a good thing because you are evolving—it may not feel great at first, but then everything is right.

So, this is good news: **these were not the end of times for the disciples but transitioning times**—and this is true for us too. I sure know that when we are in-between-times, we may just want to throw in the towel and give up on everything and everyone.

The truth is, we all face difficulty and doubt in our lives regardless of how little or much faith we may have. **Change and transition, the ending of the old and the beginning of the new, those moments in between are some of the hardest times we face in this life.** It seems that the conflict and disappointment all these things bring is not worth the pain.

**But it is worth the pain!** If you just continue working on it, soon the overwhelming pain and fears are gone and forgotten because there is new life, and this new life brings with it the greatest joys we can ever experience: new, fresh, bountiful fruit.

Now, what follows next is the key to this fulfillment,

Jesus said to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” They answered him, “No.” 6 He said to them, “Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish.

In spite of their fatigue, the disciples were willing to take Jesus at his word and throw out their nets once more—and **a miracle took place**! **This was a glimpse of the upcoming new life that was about to powerfully rush in into their lives**.

Let’s make sense of all this and be honest for a moment. **How many times have we stopped casting the net?** Meaning doing what we know in our hearts God is calling us to be and do. Some of us may have stopped “casting the net,” and instead, **we cast away all we could ever hope to be because we got tired of the trials, of the waiting**, and not being able to move forward and be successful?

Today, I want you to know that there is so much more for you because God is not finished with you. God has never abandoned the boat and is still in the business of filling up nets. This means that God is with each one of us. God has not and will not throw your life away ever. Our best life still awaits ahead of us. Our best ministry as a congregation is ahead in our future. That is why God wants us to let him continue to work in our lives. Whatever dreams and projects we may have, if we are honoring God by casting the net (being obedient and faithful), God will bless us and lead us to fruitfulness—in our personal lives and as a church.

Can you see this? **There is no way we can lose with God even if we get it wrong at times.** God is graceful and wants us to be well. God wants to fill our nets with fresh fish—so to speak (although I would prefer fresh ribeye steak).

Here is the bottom line: God wants you fulfilled and accomplished even as you may face seasons of drought and conflict.

So, this is what we do: we never stop listening, looking for God, and taking heed of God’s Word. We never forget and always to trust that God has the last word over our lives—not our enemy; not our problems; not our needs; not our success; not our wealth; not our lacking or our doubt; not even our guilt or sins; not anything else but **God will have the last word over our lives!** And even when we act contrary to what God had asked from us -like when Peter and the others did when they were told to wait in a mountain in Galilee, but they didn’t- God meets us where we are and use that as an opportunity to build us up rather than judge us.

By now, you can see that this story is not about fishing at all but keeping faith and trusting what God said about us and to us.

I invite you today to let God speak over your life and have the last word over you. And, while you are in that tension of in-between-times, just stay faithful, listen, and keep the Word and you will be blessed in ways you can’t begin to imagine. Amen.