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 they were confident was God’s plan for them and stop working for it.

Has that ever happened to you? Have you ever experienced unexpected change, and you had no idea if it would make things better or worse in your life? So often, we side with the latter: How can change be any good, right?

This morning, I am talking about those unexpected moments when things change so fast that we don’t even have time to make sense of it. In such times, we often feel we have no place to go.

Today’s message deals with the question: Can I trust God to have the last word over my life in uncertain times?

There is a story in the Bible that will help us 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.

This is the third appearance by Jesus after the resurrection. He came to the disciples that were by the Sea of Tiberias. This is somewhat surprising because this is not where Jesus told his disciples to wait for him once they arrived at Galilee. 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? This is a critical part of the story and the teaching of today’s message.

What Peter did is the key to this question. 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.’”

They were not at the mountain where Jesus told them to wait for him but at the Sea of Tiberias fishing. They did this as they were trying to make sense of the unexpected turn of events they were experiencing (the dead Jesus and his resurrection), so they went to a familiar place—at least there, they knew who they were: fishermen. But were they?

Some people argue that at this point, Peter and the others were giving up on their calling to be a “fisher of people” and went back to their old vocation. Even as Jesus appeared to be back, it is fair to say that there had to be some doubt, disappointment, and perhaps even resentment for them to do that. 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. Peter and the 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, they headed out to do what they knew as a way to start picking up the broken pieces of their lives.

I don’t know about you, but I can identify with them and relate to the uncertainty they must have felt when “the rug was pulled out” from under them.

The way I understand what is happening to them is that they were reluctantly letting go of the seemingly unfulfilled promises, hopes, and dreams of their life with Jesus, and now they were trying 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, I mean, literally, “They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.” They caught nothing.

Obviously, life was not getting any better. On the contrary, the disappointment of these skilled fishermen continued to be compounded with the empty nets.

How is it possible to catch no fish in a whole night? Were they good for nothing now?

But then this man—they did not know it was Jesus—asked 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.”

How is this possible? This sounds almost like a joke. What difference does it make to throw the net on the left or right side of the boat? I mean, do fish stay only on one side? That is silly, of course. So, this is not about whether fish know what they are doing; this is about us trusting what Jesus is asking us to do. The reason the disciples caught fish this time was not because they threw the net on the right side but because they did it—even if reluctantly. Their breakthrough came not through skill but through trust and faith. The miracle happened not because they fished on the right side but because they did not give up and threw the net out one more time.

Trust, faith, and resilience are critical to finding fulfillment in life. Like the disciples, all of us will get disappointed, experience terrible things, and get hit hard by life more than once. I like what Sylvester Stallone says in his character of Rocky Balboa, “It’s not about how hard you hit. It’s about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward. How much you can take and keep moving forward.”

When I hear that, I understand that the only strength that can help us through hardship is faith, believing that there is good ahead of us, and we fight for it. Sure, it is hard to believe there is any good ahead when we are in the middle of the fight and chaos. In hindsight, everyone knows what to do, but it sure does not feel like that when we are going through it.

So, our challenge is when we are in those in-between times, those transitional times when we have no idea what’s happening, and it would be easier to stop trying.

I know you know what I am talking about. For the disciples, seeing Jesus die and now resurrected, not catching fish for a whole night, and not knowing what was next, those were the “in-between” times. They 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 any “new world” was coming, but just the end.

Does this speak to you? Is it relatable? Have you been in the in-between what it was and what it will be? As dreadful as it may feel, this is a good place to be because it fosters new faith, growth, and strength in us—it may not feel great at first, but then everything gets better. After the battles and storms, we become stronger, wiser, kinder, and more compassionate. And most importantly, it is after that we find our place in this life, what we are meant to be.

This leads me back to the question I posed at the beginning: Can I trust God to have the last word over my life in uncertain times? Let me tell you a story.

It was January 2004; I was about the start my last semester of seminary in Mexico. Evelyn and I were engaged and planning our wedding for July 3rd, 2004. We were planning our life together. We had a plan. But little did we know that things were about to change in ways we couldn’t have imagined.

A friend of mine, a pastor, serving in Dallas, Texas encouraged me to come to the Perkins School of Theology to inquire about their master’s program. So, I did. I came to Dallas in January 2004 to explore the possibility of coming to Perkins during the Summers to get a Master’s in Divinity degree.

So, I came to Dallas, visited Perkins, met some wonderful people there, and basically was told that I could apply as an international student but needed to wait until the next year since I was going to miss the deadline. No problem.

That day, I met a lady called Jeannie Trevino-Teddlie, the Director of the Mexican American Program at Perkins at the time. She was excited about me coming to Perkins. That afternoon, after we met, she got a call from a pastor, Russell Noland, asking for a seminarian that could do Spanish ministry at Casa Linda United Methodist Church, and she told him, “Well, I just met this young man from Mexico that may be coming to Dallas to study.” So, she gave him the number of my pastor friend to reach out to me.

The next day, he called us, and we agreed to meet for lunch. We talked about the ministry opportunity (well, I smiled and listened, I hardly spoke and understood any English). After lunch, he asked me to come back to meet with the church board for an interview. So I came back in February and got the job.

After that, I went back to Mexico and told Evelyn, “I got the job. We are moving to Dallas.” You must keep in mind that all this is happening very fast and unexpectedly. Evelyn was already practicing her dentistry career, which meant she had to leave everything she had worked for behind. By accepting this job, we were stepping into the unknown, the “in-between” times.

(Now, you must need to give Evelyn a lot of credit. I mean, she could have said, “What do you mean we are going to Dallas? We are just getting married and this is not what we talked about!”)

Long story short, we married July 3rd and moved to Dallas July 6th with only shoes, clothes, a coffee maker, and some other stuff—just what we could fit in the trunk and back seat of the car.

You get the picture: we started our life together having barely anything in a new place on the third day of our wedding anniversary (Happy Anniversary!). However, we never felt we lacked anything; we were happy and willing because we were doing what we were supposed to do. So, in our “Yes,” we did not do it because it was easy, but because it was faithful to our convictions and what we believed God was asking from us—like casting the net on the right side of the boat.

Here is what I am getting to with this: Life gets better when you don’t give up in those “in-between” times and what carries you through those uncertain times is faith and trust. You have to have faith, know who God is and what God says about you and to you, and be confident about that. There will be voices and terrible things that will tell you to let go, to give up, and that you won’t make it. The only way to overcome that is by letting God have the last word over your life.

But what if we give up? What if we are less than faithful and don’t trust what God says? Are we done? Remember I said that the disciples were told to go to a mountain and wait for Jesus there, but instead, they were somewhere else and were fishing—not waiting? That tells me that even when we are not where we are supposed to be and do things we are not supposed to do, God still shows up. We will never be too far gone for God. So, even when we keep getting it wrong, it can get better if we start listening to what Jesus says. Grace is such a simple yet powerful thing.

By now, I hope you can see that this story is not about fishing but about keeping faith and trusting what God said about us and to us. When you recall that memory, that is what gets you through the “in-between” times. When you remember that no matter the change you experience, the challenges, and the disappointment, God has not and will not change his mind about you, that is when you get stronger and overcome.

Here is the invitation: Trust, believe, and don’t give up. God will not leave you abandoned in a “boat with no fish” to figure things out on your own. Of course, you will have reasons to second guess God and yourself during those times, but if you know what is in here (heart), you have to keep going for that breakthrough. So, always cast the net one more time and let God have the last word over you. It gets better when you do.