

Sometimes we find ourselves frustrated, feeling as though we've been caught in a situation that seems beyond our control. As adults, we think we can manage all that life throws at us, but when we encounter pandemics and natural disasters, we realize our powers of control are limited. Even during the innocence of childhood, we may run into frustrating situations, as was the case with

a little boy experiencing his first day of first grade. At lunchtime, he packed up his crayons, papers, scissors, and paste and was ready to head out the door.

His teacher stopped him and said, "It's time for lunch, Tommy. Why aren't you with the other children?"

"I always go home when the other kids go to eat," he replied. "I'll come back tomorrow."

"No, Tommy," the teacher explained, "that was last year when you were in kindergarten. This year you get to stay all day. You go to lunch, then come back here in the afternoon to study and do more work. You're only half through for the day...there's lots more."

Tommy thought about this for a moment, then shook his head in frustration and asked, "Who signed me up for that?"<sup>1</sup>

How many times have you felt that way? Who signed us up for a pandemic? I never signed up to see the violence and racism that continues to erupt in our nation. Those who have lost jobs may wonder, "When did I sign up for the frustration of unemployment?"

No matter what paths our lives may take, we all encounter frustrations—in our jobs, our families, and even in church. It's a part of life. Inevitable.

And that's when Jesus seems to show up, as he did on the day when tired fishermen had been tossing their nets in the water for long hours and hadn't caught a thing.

"Simon, I think it's time to head in," I imagine his fishing partner saying. "It's been a bad day. The fish just don't seem to be here. We've been out here most of the night, and our nets have little to show for all our effort. I'm frustrated and tired. Maybe we'll have better luck tomorrow."

"I suppose you're right," Simon may have replied. "Start fresh after some long-needed rest. Let's pull in the nets, clean them up, and head home."

While washing their nets on the shore, one of the fishermen says to Simon, "Hey, who's that guy getting

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into your boat? I haven't seen him around here before. He doesn't even look like a fisherman—more like a rabbi, so why's he in your boat? The crowds seem to be gathering around and listening to him. What's up with that?"

Simon walked over to the stranger sitting in his boat, "Excuse me, why are you in my boat with all these people gathered around you?"

"I'm teaching them, and I'm glad you arrived. I need to create a bit more space so everyone can hear, so could you possibly row the boat offshore a bit?"

"It's been a long night," Simon replied. "I'm exhausted."

"I think you might find what I have to say refreshing," the man named Jesus replied.

"OK. As long as I don't have to throw out into the water this last net that still needs cleaning."

As Simon listened to Jesus teach, something lifted his spirits. He felt refreshed. Inspired. The time seemed to fly, and when Jesus told the crowds goodbye, he invited Simon to throw out his net one more time.

Simon may have thought to himself, *This guy doesn't know anything about fishing. Doesn't he respect that I took my boat out for him to teach the crowd? But asking me to put out my net? He's already interrupted my evening with his impromptu teaching. Why does he ask about my nets now?*

Instead, Simon replied, "Sir, I've been fishing all night and haven't caught a thing." And yet, this Jesus had so inspired him that Simon continued, "But if you say so, I will let down my net."

What happened next was completely unexpected. So many fish appeared in the net that Simon had to call another boat to help him haul them in. In response, Simon said to Jesus, "Oh my God. I don't know how that happened, but I'm not worthy to have all this abundance."

Jesus reassured him, "Oh Simon, you're fine. Don't be afraid. I'm inviting you to catch people in God's net of love instead of catching fish."

It wasn't long until Jesus called others to join Simon Peter and himself in this fishing expedition of catching people in a net so large that even you and I have been embraced in God's love.

I find it interesting that Jesus showed up just when Simon Peter seemed the most frustrated. Jesus could have arrived on that beach any day, but it's when Simon was at the end of long, hard day rather than an easy day.

Come to think of it, that seems to be when Jesus most often shows up in my life as well, when I'm frustrated, confused, unsure what to do, when I don't have a clear plan of what happens next. In times of chaos, Jesus just seems to appear, offering me a Way through the messiness of life.

That's not to say that Jesus hasn't been there all along, but I often notice him more when I've lost my way. Jesus is always just around the corner, offering the Way, sitting in a fishing boat, teaching the crowd. And then he invites us after a hard day to go farther out into the water, to trust that when all seems lost, God still provides. Somehow, Jesus finds us over and over again and provides an

abundance of just what we need at the moment. For Simon Peter it was an abundance of fish. For those living with loss, a new opportunity appears. For one low on funds, surprising assistance arrives in his mailbox. For those who are hungry, a meal is prepared. For someone in sadness, a listening ear opens to hear her story. For someone stressed out, a space of silence arrives as someone offers to care for a parent's children for someone recovering from illness a card arrives in the mail.

When Jesus arrives in our lives at just the right time, he not only fills our nets, but he asks us to reach toward those around us, for they may also be carrying empty nets in need of Jesus' abundance.

So, when you find yourself frustrated, try fishing, and trust that Jesus can fill our nets.

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<sup>1</sup> Hodgins, Michael. *1001 More Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers*. Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #802 (adapted).