

First, friends, I do recognize that I stand between you and the Patriots game in London, that started at the same time as our service. We'll get you home for the second half, if it's your desire to watch it.

What a privilege it is for me to share some thoughts today on this Laity and Pledge Sunday. As always, my message today is a simple one. Simple is my middle name. But I hope it resonates with you. It's a message we all know, but which may sometimes need to be remembered in the moment.

Like others in the congregation at Asbury, I spent my career managing people and processes. I guess I was OK at it over 40 plus years, because I never got the sack! I got paid to solve problems, remove roadblocks that prevented my staff from reaching their goals, and when necessary, influence others to get something done. Influence others to get something done is a polite way of saying "raise heck." I think my teams always appreciated the support I was willing and able to provide to solve problems on their behalf.

I problem-solved so much and for so long, that it became a habit that extended outside the workplace, sometimes to my detriment. I had to learn over time (and still must remind myself) that sometimes my loved ones, and

others, just want to vent and aren't asking for help. For instance, it might go like this hypothetical example:

Me: How was your day, Cami?

Cami: Not very good. The chemistry professor put questions on the exam that we didn't cover in class and were in a chapter we hadn't been assigned yet, so I don't know how he thought we were supposed to know the answers! The grade is not going to be good.

Me: That's ridiculous. You should send him an email and ask him to exclude those questions from the grading. Or give ME his email address and I'll bring it to his attention. Or I'll call him!

Cami: Don't you dare, Dad! I can handle it!

Me: OK then but let me know if I need to help!

I'm trying to get better at this, but as they say, old habits die hard.

Now more significantly, especially today on Laity Sunday and on the day we will dedicate our pledges to support Asbury in 2025, sometimes I think it's completely up to me, or us, to solve a problem at church, or make our church finances stronger, or otherwise remove roadblocks. I am pretty confident that I am not alone in this regard. We all want to help Asbury, as we should. But I

know in my case, sometimes in the interest of trying to help, I forget something that is absolutely fundamental to our Christian existence.

In the scripture from Luke chapter 5 that Carl read this morning, Jesus came upon Simon Peter and the other fishermen on the shore of Lake Gennesaret as he was speaking to a large crowd of people on the beach. Simon and the others had finished a long and frustrating night of fishing, with no luck. The lack of success was a big deal, as fishing was their livelihood. I promise you, I can relate to fishing with no luck. Just like my golf game in my younger days, I really enjoy fishing, but I am pretty lousy at it. And sometimes, the fish just don't cooperate. That was certainly the case when Simon, John and James and the others were fishing the night before.

When Jesus was done teaching the assembled crowd from Simon's boat, which he used as a convenient place to speak to a large number of people on shore, he asked Simon to grab a net and take the boat away from shore.

Simon was anxious to do what Jesus asked, for sure. But he also felt it was wise to warn Jesus that the fish weren't cooperating. Of course, Jesus was unfazed. I think he may have smiled when Simon told him in so many words that it was a waste of time. And you know the rest of the story. Fish came

from all over to fill the net, nearly to the breaking point. And then they filled another net!

I think it's noteworthy that Jesus asked Simon to do his part by grabbing a net and taking the boat out to deeper water. I'm sure Jesus could have just commanded the fish to swim to shore and jump up on the beach, without Simon Peter lifting a finger. But he wanted Simon to be part of the solution, to do the tasks that would be the foundation of the amazing act to follow. That's really important.

Of course, this awesome experience directly led to Jesus inviting these fishermen to become fishers of people. These sinful scruffy, poorly educated and inarticulate fishermen were about to become central figures in Christ's time on earth and beyond that, even today as we still consider them disciples. But today, let this scripture remind us that God can accomplish things with us that we simply can't do in the absence of God. I like this phrase that was part of a commentary by the pastor of a church in Florida. (I read some commentaries this week, because you know we have a PhD in theology in the room and I really didn't want to mess this up. No pressure!) Anyway, this pastor in Florida said, "How different things can be in life when Jesus is on the

boat!” Isn’t that great! “How different things can be in life when Jesus is on the boat!”

If I’m lucky, I can catch a fish or two in the bay down at Connimicut. But even when the fish are especially hungry, I can only catch one or two at a time, even if I use a rig that has two hooks on it. And that’s not a sure thing. Far from it.

In the same way, as we, the laity of Asbury, contribute to Asbury’s mission in the community and the world through our gifts, service and offerings, there is a limit to what we can accomplish on our own. But when we ask Jesus to get on the boat with us, all the limitations disappear.

I know that throughout the rich history of this church, God has been with you, and He certainly has been during my six years here. I know from experience that this church family’s faith in God is strong and unwavering, as strong as this building’s mighty walls.

But I also know that sometimes we risk putting all the weight of our challenges on our own shoulders- and that’s true in ALL aspects of our lives, including our church life- and carrying that burden on our own will make us weak, and ultimately, we can collapse under the weight. And so, on this laity Sunday, I would ask that we always remember these words from Isaiah chapter 41.

“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will

strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will hold you up with My righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10). And verse 13 says “For I, the Lord your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, ‘Fear not, I will help you’”.

As we dedicate our financial pledges for next year, it’s critical in the face of increasing costs of property insurance and other expenses that we do all that we can do. We can surely catch some fish if we do what we’re able to do. But we also need Jesus on the boat with us, because the Holy Spirit will do amazing things when we let God help us carry the burden.

Friends, we all know that, but this fundamental truth can be obscured by our human weakness in the moment, especially in moments when we face a challenge head-on. We can try to be problem-solvers on our own, but we’ll be limited by our humanness. We need Jesus on the Asbury boat to do amazing things. Let’s wear this truth like a banner and never fail to ask God to take our hand and do amazing things with us. Not just FOR us, but as was the case with Simon Peter, along with us.

May it be so. Amen.