My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts always be acceptable in your sight, our strength and our redeemer, Amen.

 I think for a lot of us, we have activities that we enjoy and favorite hobbies. We can be caught baking cakes, quilting, fiddling with model trains and landscapes, putting new flowers and shrubs in the garden, all manner of things which we do. But why do we do them? (take all answers). I think for a lot of us, we like to see the results of our labors and smile at how things turned out. The end result is always guiding the work.

 But not all of us can see those end results. If I were to be given a model train set, I don’t know that I’d get more than just a figure 8 track and a rather small one at that. Pretty boring stuff for a finished product. Kate and I are always trying to put into practice what we see on the many home improvement shows we watch on HGTV, and while their stuff always turns out pretty, our projects turn out…well…less so. But give me a few photos and a scrapbook, and watch out. I can do this. And really well.

 But I wonder how we would react if we were given a project with no solid idea of the end result. Why would we want to do that? Our time is valuable, and we want to know what’s going on and why we should do it. What would be our reaction to someone who came along and told us exactly what to do, but not why?

In our Scripture this week, Jesus calls Simon to do a project without clear results. “Put out into the deep water,” he says, “and let down your nets for a catch.” But there’s no idea of what this catch will be. A good one? Just adequate, or abundant? A catch that feeds just one family, or one that feeds a whole village?

 The call to Simon is clear and simple: put out your net. But the result is difficult to even imagine. A catch seems impossible, given that the fishermen have already been fishing all night and have caught nothing. They seem exhausted at this point. They’ve worked ALL NIGHT without anything to show for it. So for Jesus to get in the boat asking them to cast their nets again—this time in deep water, which most likely means a bit more work and time—does not seem promising.

But there’s a catch. God is at work here, but Simon just doesn’t know it yet. Simon says, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught ***nothing***.” Isn’t that what we’d say to someone who just walked up to what we were doing, never having met them before, and they start to advise us on the thing we love to do most and best? No, do that stitch, not this. Use a little more yeast for the dough. More lengths of track and a few trees. There’s too many pictures on the page, it’s too cluttered. Simon’s reaction to Jesus’ instruction is distrust, disbelief and maybe just a little bit…just a little…defensiveness.

Simon is quick to tell Jesus what he knows, because it is difficult for him to imagine what he does not know. Yet, perhaps more out of resignation than trust, he lets down the nets anyway. And after hauling in the nets filled with multitudes of fish—so many fish that the nets are beginning to break—Simon Peter confesses to Jesus. What does he say? He says that he’s not worthy. He was so convinced with what he knew that he could not have imagined another result, and it prevented him from trusting in what Jesus could do.

But instead of calling out Peter’s unbelief, Jesus simply responds, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” Instead of focusing on Peter’s lack of trust, Jesus highlights the continual call to catch, even when the results are a mystery to us. “When at first you don’t succeed, try, try again”, right? Isn’t that the old quote? Well, like most things, not quite. The full quotation is, “When at first you don’t succeed, try, try again. Then quit. There’s no sense being a damn fool about it.”

So I think Jesus has it right here. Just as he did in our scripture a couple of weeks ago when he lopped off the part about God’s vengeance when reading the Isaiah scroll just before they threw him out of the church, he lops off the last half of our proverb here to remind us that there are no damn fools when doing God’s work.

Most of our life is taken up in the days between the work and the result. School kids study and get into all manner of interests and talents in order to be considered successful in society. Will they go to college? Become a talented performer? Dedicate their lives to civil service? No one knows. Millenials work toward a retirement they cannot see. What’s going to happen to them? Will they become ill in their middle years and forfeit their savings for end-of-life care? Will they live happily ever after in a bucolic little New England Town with a little white church and nothing to do? (Do we know of a place like that?) No one knows. We rarely, if ever, are promised a clear result to our work.

Foreseeing results doesn’t seem to matter to Jesus. When he asks Simon to put out into the deep water, he just asks Simon to do what Simon knows how to do. Nothing more, nothing less. Simon is a fisherman. He knows just how to cast nets for a catch. He knows the sea and the life within it. He knows how to do this; it is the work he has been equipped to do. So this time, when Jesus asks Simon to do his job, the result—the catch—is left to Jesus.

In the Isaiah reading, we hear another call to simply go, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” God asks. Send where? To do what? Our modern ears doubt first, always. God’s call elicits clarifying questions, right?

But Isaiah, without question or curiosity about the end result (or even what the journey will look like), responds with enthusiasm: “Here am I; send me!” No worries about housing, wages, how to get there, what to eat, who any companions might be on the journey. GO.

The call to follow the Lord is a call with no end in sight. Isaiah isn’t even told what to do exactly; he is just called to go. The simple fact that he is here, that he exists, is enough for him to serve as an integral part of God’s mission.

I’ll leave you with these final thoughts.

Isaiah, like Simon, and all the others who go before us, are called in the midst of our daily lives to serve in God’s mission for the world. Cast your nets. Bake the cakes. Crochet the afghans. Set up the trains. Teach the students. Balance the books. Weld the plates. Maintain the equipment, manage the staff, administer the IVs, answer the phones, paint the pictures, sing the songs and dance the dances—let’s just do what we know how to do, and Jesus will use it to draw others into the kingdom of God. So let’s not try so hard to second-guess God.

Growing the beloved community requires trust that all is well in its time. That we will be guided to cast the nets on the correct side of the boat, in the water not to shallow nor deep. The New Testament uses the boat metaphor as the Church for a reason. It can hold us all, but it’s fragile and may sink or capsize if we’re not careful, and not listening to Jesus. Even if we think he’s asleep in the storm. But that’s another sermon for another day.

God doesn’t reveal our destination; to do so would disinvite trust, and just let our fears get started and run us in the other direction. Instead, God reveals to us a means through which we are called to participate in God’s end result. While we do what we are created, equipped, and skilled to do, we entrust the result to God.

Because when it comes to God’s call, there’s always a catch. And for that, thanks be to God, Amen.