

<i>Date Preached</i>	06-Feb-2022	<i>Date Initiated</i>	25-Jan-2022
<i>Where Preached</i>	SAK	<i>Appointed Readings</i>	Epi 5, Yr C (Ann'l Mtg)

" 'Put out into the deep water, and let your nets down for a catch.' "



At the first session of a confirmation class the priest is teaching, she asks the class, "What must we do before we can expect forgiveness from sin?" After a long silence, one of the students raises his hand and timidly says, "Sin?"

That little joke **will**—I'm sure you'll be relieved to hear—have to suffice, for today, on the topic of sin. For as much as our collect and our readings point toward our human sinfulness and the forgiveness we have in Christ Jesus,¹ in preparing this sermon, I felt pulled by another issue: one that doesn't come close to rivaling the gravity of sin,² but may be troubling some of us, all the same.

If you've picked up and perused the parish's 2021 Annual Report for today's Annual Meeting, which **[(8:30) follows our 10:30 Eucharist || (10:30) immediately follows this Eucharist]**, you may have noticed that the budget the Vestry has approved for 2022 projects a \$45,000 deficit. Now, before I go any farther, let me say a few purely pragmatic things about this number:

- First, it is a *projection*, not a truth. Steve Morocco and his team use conservative numbers in building our budgets: minimizing projected income and maximizing projected expenses. Saint Andrew's has a good track record of surpassing our income projections and controlling our actual expenses.
- Second, a budget deficit is *neither* an indicator of financial insolvency *nor* a cause for worry. Saint Andrew's is not, in the *slightest* way, a parish in fiscal peril or distress. Even if the 2022 deficit *were* to hold through the end of the year, we have copious means to cover it from our reserves.

Nevertheless, questions naturally arise: Why are we going into this year expecting to spend so much more than we take in? Why didn't we choose to live within our 'means'? to trim our dreams to meet existing realities? To be sure, using projected income as a cap on budgeted expenditures would have balanced the budget and left us feeling safe and secure. At year's end, our bank account would be full ... but our nets, I'm afraid, would be largely empty.

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¹ See, e.g., the prophet Isaiah's woe, having seen the Lord God, as a "man of unclean lips, [living] among a people of unclean lips"; St Paul's reminder to the Corinthians that "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures"; and St Peter's protestation that Jesus leave him, "for I am a sinful man."

² I do, however, plan to preach on sin and sinfulness during several of the Sundays in Lent.

Jesus' ministry in Galilee, as we've just heard, is off to a good start. He's made a modest splash in Capernaum, a fishing town on the shore of Lake Gennesaret,³ and He's 'hooked' a small band of followers who want to keep Him all for themselves. Attentive to them, Jesus has St Peter row Him a little way from the shore, so that the people who *already* know and trust and love Him can see and hear Him.

But however fond Jesus is of these first followers ... bobbing up-and-down in the shallows of the shoreline is not the calling of Jesus' ministry. To *fill* your nets, you must go to where the fish are. Gennesaret is a vast lake,⁴ and Jesus knows its greatest yield lies out in its deeper waters, far from land. So, He turns to Peter and tells him to make for the middle of the lake: a strenuous row, after a long night of fruitless fishing. But once they arrive, no sooner do they put down their nets than catch a haul of fish so great it threatens to swamp them. "*Here ... out in the middle of the lake, far from the familiar crowds and snug little coves you're accustomed to,*" Jesus tells Peter and the other new disciples,⁵ "*here is where you'll catch people in my Name.*"

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A balanced budget, my friends, would be a snug little cove. We could hew close to the familiar shores we have always sailed: funding the same positions ... putting on the same programs. By tending, largely, to those of us who are already here ... much like Jesus bobbing just offshore to teach His first followers ... we'd be operating in a closed, if comfortable, loop: largely talking to ourselves, ministering to ourselves and supporting ourselves.

But the safety of always being within a rope's-throw of the beach isn't what Jesus seeks for His disciples, and it isn't what He desires for us, either. He calls us to put out into the deeper waters and let down our nets *there*—and that's where this year's budget has sailed. The lion's share of our increased expenditures ↓ funds new or enhanced positions that will enable us to open ourselves more and more to the greater Kent community: to preach the Good News of Jesus ... to teach the love and share the grace of God ... to offer helping hands of compassion and mercy ... to draw into the Spirit's tether people—young families; newcomers to Kent; those who may be lonely or seeking; maybe even teenagers and young adults—whom we haven't dreamed of 'catching' in many a year.

- Our 2022 budget increases funding for our Parish Administrator role, as KC deftly takes on more and more responsibility and becomes our operations interface for parishioners and non-parishioners, alike.
- Our 2022 budget will pay our new Director of Music a competitive wage. We are incredibly grateful to Tom, who has long accepted a salary that doesn't adequately reflect all his training and experience. As he retires, we hope to hire an accomplished sacred musician who will refresh our music program: as a way to attract new members ... and involve musicians of *all* ages and talents.

³ More frequently called, other than by Luke, the Sea of Galilee.

⁴ An area of more than 60 square miles.

⁵ As an aside, St Andrew gets very little airtime in Luke: only one small mention, in a list of those whom Jesus names Apostles (6:13-16).

- And, most exciting of all, our 2022 budget creates a new position of Christian Educator. Having heard both *from* and *about* them, we know that there are many families in this area who want their children to receive Christian education and formation: who want them to learn the stories of the Bible ... to grow in their love of Jesus ... to become full engaged participants in our liturgies.

Likewise, there are other families in and around Kent who may not feel drawn to worship or Sunday school, but who nevertheless yearn for a place where they and their children can belong to a greater community of mutual care and nurture.

As I'll never tire of saying, one of our most important responsibilities, as Christians, is to create *more* Christians ... not in *our* image, but in *Christ's*. Our new Christian Educator will be an essential part of our carrying out this most joyful—and difficult—duty.

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The norm, when we see a negative number on the bottom line of a spending plan, is to label it a "deficit budget": to be concerned about it ... maybe even a little apprehensive.

But here in the Church, as we talk about a *Christ-oriented* spending plan, I want to suggest a new term: a "deep-water budget." A budget that doesn't play it safe for bankers, but sails out into the middle of the lake ... **for** Jesus. A budget that doesn't seek to conserve what (we think) we own, but to grow the gifts we've been given ... **in** Jesus. A budget that doesn't bemoan how few fish there are along the familiar shore, but rows out to find all that await to be discovered in the deeper waters ... **of** Jesus. "Do not be afraid," He tells us. "From now on, you will be *catching people*."



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