

## **Disability Awareness Sunday**

*Thoughts from Pastor Sandra Alexis on the Revised Common Lectionary text*

DAART has recommended using the healing story in John 9:1-41 on Disability Awareness Sunday, April 14. If you are preaching the Revised Common Lectionary (John 21:1-19) that day, here are some notes to help with your sermon preparation.

This pericope begins with an unsuccessful fishing expedition. This wasn't the Andy Griffith type fishing with a pole. This was exhausting, back-breaking, net-casting labor. After all that work, they end up with no fish. At the end of work and ready to rest, Jesus (whom they do not recognize) shows up with the direction to cast their nets in a different place. You may remember that Jesus also gave fishing directions in Luke 5 and ended up telling the disciples they would be fishers of people. This time Jesus says they will "find" fish (Greek word "he...urisko") on the other side. It's like those fish are just waiting to be found. The good news is that the disciples found an abundance; the bad news is that they found an abundance when they were already tired and spent. They had to push themselves to bring in this catch but it was worth it.

This text could be interpreted as a directive to follow Jesus' call regarding our outreach. There are more out there than are being "found" by the church today. We all like to think we are a welcoming church but some people with special needs may feel excluded by visible and invisible barriers. Finding them will require energy, strength, and perseverance. There are some who need larger print Bibles and hymnals or Braille options. Some need accessible doorways and bathrooms. All need patience and understanding. There is an abundance of those waiting to be found and brought into the boat with the other followers of Christ. Jesus repeatedly called us to those left out of society. Are we fishing on the side of the boat Jesus calls us to?

Notably despite the avant-garde fishing tactics and the extremely large haul, the net was not torn. The fabric of the fishing institution was not broken by casting their nets where Jesus directed. In the same respect, there is room in our churches for accommodations to those with special needs. We can take the risk of opening our hearts and minds to welcome those with challenges. It will not be easy but it will be worth it.

In the second part of this text, Jesus tells Simon Peter to care for those the resurrected Christ will soon leave behind. The first command He gives is "feed my lambs" followed by "tend my sheep" and finally "feed my sheep." The first target of care were the young, vulnerable lambs. We the church are called first and foremost to care for those who need a little help. We are to be fishers for those needing to be found and shepherds of those needing to be cared for. We will not be able to reach everyone but within our congregations we can find those left out because of a special need and care for those entrusted to us the best way we can.