When I lived in Northern Virginia, I really enjoyed a specific yoga class at the gym on Saturdays. The time was perfect (I didn’t have to get up too early) and the instructor was terrific. The only challenge was that everyone else loved it, too. Although no extra fee was required for the class, you had to have a ticket to get in that you could not procure until the day of the class. I used to aim to get to the gym about 45 minutes before class started, get my ticket and do cardio until start time.

One Saturday, I arrived at the gym at my usual time, but there were no tickets left. The woman who had walked into the gym just before me had gotten the last one. I was excluded from the class this week. I had really looked forward to that class all week. I was quite disappointed and spent a little time that day thinking about all that I was missing by not being part of the class. It seemed poor planning and arbitrary for the gym to offer this class in such a small room that people who wanted to be part of it were excluded. Clearly, the gym lacked vision of what this class could be and didn’t care about what I needed. The benefits of the class were limited to those who got there first.

In this week’s Gospel, Jesus appears to seven of his disciples while they are fishing. It’s no accident that there are seven disciples present – not six or eight – because wherever the number seven appears in the Bible it symbolizes completeness, perfection. It’s also no accident that Jesus appears to his disciples while they are fishing. We are reminded of the story in Matthew’s Gospel when Jesus first called Peter and Andrew to be his disciples. He told them to follow him and he would make them fishers for people. Now, Jesus has completed the work of death and resurrection and is preparing his disciples – his church – for the work they are to do after his ascension. **The major work of the church was and still is to fish for people, that is to go to our friends, our neighbors and to those we don’t even know yet to spread the Gospel of Jesus’s love.** Jesus helps the church to accomplish this. If we try one way to spread the Gospel and it doesn’t work, through the guidance of Jesus, we adapt and try something different. Metaphorically, we cast our nets on a different side. And when we are faithful to do this, Jesus will ensure that our nets are full.

Although this concept seems so easy, it’s sometimes a little more difficult for us to act upon. Most of us as Episcopalians look forward to evangelism about as much as we look forward to going to the dentist, which is to say, that we’d rather avoid it if we could. We share with our friends our favorite TV show, or the name of a good book we’ve just read, or recommend a movie they might like to watch or a restaurant they might like to visit. But sometimes we just can’t seem to get out the words to recommend Jesus or even to recommend our church community. Perhaps we fear that our friends will reject our recommendation and think we are odd to spend time on Sunday in church. Perhaps we have bought into the secular notion that it’s politically incorrect to talk to someone or even more so advocate for a particular faith. Perhaps we are cautious about inviting others to church because if lots of new people came here things would change. The new people might start new programs that are different. Or they might take on leadership roles and have opinions that are different from our own. Or they might sit in our seat. Or, if every person in this church was able to get one new person to come to church, then church might be like that yoga class in Northern Virginia on Saturday. We’d have to come early to get a seat. Or, perhaps we’d have to do what I always wished my gym would do – expand the space so there would be enough room for everyone. And that would cost money and make the church look different.

These things might well happen if we cast our nets as Jesus tells us to do. And change is hard and scary. We may have to give up something – our favorite seat, our old way of doing things, our control. But as disciples we are not only called but commanded to fish for people, casting our nets so that we reach as many as possible. And then, once we’ve caught them, we’re called to feed their faith and tend to their needs.

God is gracious and God gives to us abundantly. But God has one more specific promise for us in our evangelism. When the disciples cast their nets as Jesus directed, they brought in 153 fish, which strained the net but didn’t break it. Most scholars believe that 153 is a symbolic number that either represents all the nationalities of the ancient world – everyone – or that represents the totality of the church. No matter how many new people we bring into God’s church, we won’t metaphorically break it. We will change the church, but not so much that it becomes unbearable for us. We might double our numbers, but God will find a way for them all to fit. We might become more diverse, but God will find a way for us all to fit in.

That’s the difference between church and the gym. We can feel free to invite all our friends into this, the greatest place we go every week, and know that through God’s abundant provision there will be a place for everyone. We can confidently follow Jesus’s call to cast our nets and to bring in the catch.