

Letting Go of the Nets

Mark 1:4-20 & 1 Corinthians 7:29-32a

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There are two things about this Gospel lesson that really annoy me. Well, it's not so much the gospel lesson itself but the way that we have been taught to interpret it. First, we are supposed to be inspired and encouraged by the decisiveness and commitment of the four disciples who immediately follow Jesus, leaving behind their occupations and families. But really ... how many of us are prepared right now to drop everything and follow Jesus to distant lands or into the inner cities of our own country for an indefinite, perhaps even permanent, period of time? I have to be honest, I personally find it hard to imagine doing this. I have to confess that I spent the first two decades of my adult life trying to figure out how to keep everything I already had in my life and follow Jesus. This story just does not inspire me to drop everything and follow Jesus like these four disciples supposedly did. Because I don't feel inspired to do what these disciples apparently did, I end up wondering if I can really call myself a disciple, wondering if I'm really a faithful child of God.



The second thing that annoys me is the whole fishing for people thing which we are supposed to see as a metaphor for evangelism. Here's the problem: 1st century Galilean fishermen did not use fishing reels, lines and hooks that were baited with delicacies designed to attract and entice the fish to bite. They fished with nets that dragged the fish into the boat or onto the shore. The fish did not have a choice "to eat or not to eat," "to bite or not to bite," "to be hooked or not to be hooked." The nets were used to drag fish from life in the water to their death in a boat or on a beach.¹ This just isn't an attractive or effective model for evangelism.

So what on earth am I, are we, supposed to do with this text? We believe that God speaks to us through these texts to build up our faith and fellowship for service to the world (ELCA Model Constitution C2.02), but this text doesn't seem to do that — at least not the way we have been taught to interpret it.

Here's something I learned this week. In the world of the Bible, fishing was not a model for evangelism. It was a metaphor for judgment and teaching.² By judgment we mean the critical discernment of people, ideas, events, or things that need to be identified and exposed for what they really are in light of the good news of Jesus. By teaching we mean the process of leading

¹ Brian P. Stoffregen at <http://www.crossmarks.com/brian/mark1x14.htm>.

² Robert H. Smith, *Matthew* (Augsburg Fortress, 1989) p. 72.

another person from ignorance to wisdom. These two things work together, we can see how critical discernment is part of the process of moving from ignorance to wisdom. So what Jesus offers Simon and Andrew, James and John is to train them to become discerning teachers — mentors and coaches — of people.

Jesus offers to teach them the good news of God’s kingdom — which is not a place where people go when they die — but the reality of God’s presence beginning here and now in the midst of our everyday lives and lasting forever. To borrow the words of Rob Bell that we heard last Sunday: God is like a song that is playing all around us all the time. The song is playing everywhere. Everybody is playing the song. It is written on our hearts. The question isn’t whether or not you and I playing the song. The question is are you in tune? Am I in tune?

Jesus offers not only to show Simon, Andrew, James and John how to live their lives in tune with God, but also to train them so that they in turn can show others how to live their lives in tune with God. Now I’m not surprised that the disciples “immediately” accepted Jesus’ offer. Who wouldn’t? As we read through the gospels following the adventures of the disciples, we discover that it actually took them three years to even begin to get the hang of it. The disciples often didn’t understand what Jesus was trying to teach them, and in the final hours of Jesus’ life they denied, betrayed and abandoned him. They failed a lot. It sure is a lot easier to follow in the footsteps of these heroes of faith when we realize they were not always very heroic — not always very smart

Last week I suggested to you that Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness teaches us that every temptation, test and trial we face in daily life is about the question: are you in tune with God?



What we learn from this week’s Scripture lessons is that being in tune with God — growing into our true child-of-God selves — sometimes involves leaving or letting go of persons and things. Simon and Andrew let go of their nets and leave them behind. James and John let go of and leave their father (vv. 18, 20). In our reading from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians he talks about the things of this world passing away as God’s kingdom dawns in us and in the world. Paul urges his readers to let go anxiety producing relationships, seemingly all-consuming sorrows &

disappointments, even distracting joys & achievements, our obsession with possession and everyday business dealings, anything that distracts or hinders us from becoming our true child-of-God selves.

At our Wednesday evening worship, I invited participants to reflect on those things that stop us from believing that we really are children of God, worthy of love and respect, capable of making a positive difference in the world today. On little pieces of paper we wrote down some of the things that hinder us from becoming our true child-of-God selves and attached them to nets that we left here before the altar, and then dipping our fingers in the font we traced a cross on our foreheads to remind us who we really are — children of God, worthy of love and respect,

capable of making a positive difference in the world today. I have left everything in place — you too may find this exercise helpful. [pieces of netting, paper and paper clips are.....]

The good news is that God in, with and through Jesus and the Holy Spirit is present here and now, ready and willing to help us let go of and leave behind those nets in which we are tangled and enmeshed, that keep us from living in tune with God.

Jesus calls us to follow him as he shows us how to grow into our child-of-God selves. Jesus calls us to follow him, promising to make each of us a fisher of people — a discerning teacher, mentor, coach or guide — helping others to see that they too are children of God. Jesus calls us be fishers of people together - to be a community of God's children: teaching, mentoring, coaching and guiding each other. Jesus calls us to be fishers of people together, a community of disciples that reaches out, accepts, welcomes and embraces all persons, without exception, especially those who have trouble believing that God loves them, those who have rarely been shown love and respect, those who doubt their ability to make a positive difference in the world.

Today's agenda includes celebrating the mission and ministry that has taken place in Christ's name, here at 610 31st Street SE, Cedar Rapids, Iowa over the last 65 years. We are calling today's celebration a Non-Retirement Party to emphasize our commitment to doing mission and ministry in Christ's name from this place for many more decades to come. But before we get to the celebration we will gather [we gathered] for our annual meeting. We will elect [elected] leaders, review [reviewed] the past year, and adopt [adopted] a ministry plan and budget for the coming year. As we lift up, celebrate and plan for mission and ministry I encourage you to think about how each ministry contributes to sharing the good news that in Christ all are worthy of love and respect, all are capable of making a positive difference in the worlds they inhabit. Amen.