



A sermon of E. Scott Winnette

February 10, 2019

Let down Your Nets

Luke 5:1-11

*Startle us, O God, with your truth; remind us that you call us to be your Body of Christ in the world. Give us strength, faith, courage and cooperation to be a faithful church of energetic disciples. Amen.*

Pond fishing is the only kind of fishing I know. Pond fishing includes vital interactions and relationships. Myriad interactions are within the fisher's body: her scrupulous skills in attaching the hook, the bobber, the weight, the worm; his eye, shoulder, arm, elbow, wrist, muscles, ligaments, hips and fingers swinging the rod, her eye in following the bobber to its wobble on the waves, our attentiveness to the bobber and patience – be still and wait and watch and wait.

In pond fishing we have a relationship with the unfortunate worm giving thanks for its muddy life as we impale it over and over on the hook's spear. The fisher has a relationship with the pond wondering where hides its insect-hunting fish. Serious fishers know the best times of day and weather. We have a tantalizing relationship with the fish attracted to the worm's charismatic blood and wiggle. The fish nibbles the worm and we snatch, reel, and catch. In pond fishing we also relate with the cleaner of the fish, the cooker of the fish, and the delighted eaters of the fish. Every player is needed, integral: no fried fish dinner without a person, a fish, a bait, a pond. And all the tools are necessary too: a pole, a line, a reel, a hook, a bobber, a weight, a stove, a skillet, some oil.

Within the amazing catch of fish in Luke there are energetic networks of interactions and relationships bound together by the Holy One. Jesus knew Simon; he had recently healed Simon's mother-in-law. Simon knew James and John; they were in the fishing business

together hoping to catch enough fish to pay off the greedy tax collectors and have enough left for their families. There is the sea, its bank, and a crowd of villagers eager to hear Jesus.

Can the story be a simple teacher and students story? A teacher working to enrich all the students; imparting wisdom to lift all their boats. Most often this story is considered to be about the Apostleship call of Jesus. And most often we wonder about the fishermen leaving their professions to follow Jesus. And we ask, did they leave their families too. And we worry, are we to do the same. And if not, are we bad?

As the story focuses on Simon, James and John, the Church calls them special; three of the twelve mighty Apostles. The Church raises them high on pedestals of power. We tend to forget others loved by Jesus: those early villager students, and Mary of Magdalene is disparaged as a prostitute rather than another Apostle. The church doesn't honor her faith. The Church forgets to lift up woman at the well as a model of holiness. The Church doesn't make the wee little man who shares his wealth an Apostle. It fixated on the twelve.

It's a problem. It's a problem when we hero-worship twelve men as the best conveyors of Holy power. It's a problem for their gender becomes a better gender. Their moms and wives and children are dismissed, forgotten. It's a problem because it introduces into Jesus' humble way of life hierarchies with few dictating faith to most. The biblical stories of Simon Peter, show him obstinate, a doubter, a challenger; yet nonetheless the Church takes this bully and builds immutable Papal authorities that overshadow, and obscure the humility teachings of Jesus. The hierarchies and castes and prejudices of the Roman Empire replicate their ladders of worth in the Church. No wonder the sexual abuse of Nuns gets swept under rugs of disinterest for ages.

It's a problem traveled through the centuries all the way to the pews in our congregations; pews are down, and pulpits are high. It's a problem when we hold to mythologies putting pastor's above laity; ideas that priestly prayers get God's attention better than prayers at home; mythologies that pastors are smarter, more virtuous, more mature, and safer. If we shift our eyes on the page, imagine it differently; well see the story isn't about Simon, James and John. We might respect Jesus interacting and relating in a beautiful picture with a bright sky, sunshine, a wide sea, villagers, fishermen, boats, and a host of other vital tools. It's story of terrific teamwork, super synergies, and egalitarian equalities.

Net fishing was an industrial type of fishing. The nets are vital; the boats vital; the people vital; the muscles of their backs and arms and legs vital in hauling, casting, dragging and pulling up hundreds of pounds of fish. If the women waited at home to clean the fish, sell the fish and cook the fish their part is equally vital. The Holy within Jesus is hero of this story. Holy Grace choreographs the host of people and tools and waters and fish making a miracle of cooperation.

Simon isn't more special than the Sea, or the crowd of listeners, or even the oars. Simon is a tool, not a hero, just a tool like all the rest – he owned the boat, loved Jesus enough to offer it as a pulpit; and listened to Jesus enough to take it too deep water. John and James are vital tools hauling in the fish. The net is a tool and the boat is a vital tool too.

Luke in this story gives great weight to the tools: the net carefully mended and cared for, the boat serving as Jesus' floating pulpit. The boat carries the Jesus, fishermen and their net. The boat serves as a cargo ship carrying the weighty catch of fish. The oars pull the boat out into deep waters.

In our age of planned-obsolescence tools rust and wear out too soon. Many have forgotten how to care for them; oiling handsaws after use, cleaning shovels, sharpening knives. We toss them into recycle bins, when their performance diminishes due to lack of care. Dave Bonta published a book, *Odes to Tools*. He lovingly tells of tools: Odes to baskets, to buckets, to socket wrenches, to hammers, to musical saws, to a hand truck.

*Ode to Scissors*

A pair of old jeans —  
I amputate both legs  
with a pair of scissors.

\*

I've cut myself on paper,  
on grass blades,  
even on certain sharp words,  
but never with scissors.

\*

One on a shelf in the basement  
beside the string,  
another with the craft paper,  
& a third nestled in the sewing cabinet  
among spools of thread:

We are rich. We have three pairs of scissors.

\*

Every schoolkid grasps  
the concept of a balance of powers  
thanks to fist rock, palm paper,  
& peace-sign scissors....

Many mistake Simon a masterful fisherman, charismatic leader, almost a Christ himself casting out nets to catch people, a powerful man and evangelist filled with special holiness. Nope, Simon is a tool like us all, even a net. I hear Jesus saying they will be a net; the Holy uses to catch people in love. Jesus tells Simon, John, James, and the disciples of past, present and future ages not to be afraid, for we will be the net together, catching people in our Body of Christ arms, with our Body of Christ hearts, by God's love within our community.

We are the Body of Christ; we are a toolshed for the Holy. Remember the first letter to the Corinthians, *For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the*

*body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ . . . Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.<sup>1</sup>*

We are a society, a body with many members, each having specific and particular roles to play. Following Jesus, we are tools for creating God's new relationships. Beware idolizing Apostle heroes as special. Beware expecting more from them. Beware giving them power over others. Look to God's spirit working by interacting and relating us to each other. As our community is the toolshed of the Holy, we are all equally vital; all deserving of each others careful attention; all to be readied and choreographed into a fishing story of lives called into God's love.

Let us pray, St. Francis' prayer.

*Adonai, make us a toolshed of your peace:  
where there is hatred, let us sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
where there is sadness, joy.*

*O divine Teacher, grant that we may not so much seek  
to be consoled as to console,  
to be understood as to understand,  
to be loved as to love.*

*For it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

*Amen.*

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<sup>1</sup> I Corinthians 12:12 & 27