

“Caught in God’s Love, We Toss Out Nets of Love”, based on Luke 5:1-11,
David Jahnke, 2/7/10

Our gospel passage begins with a crowd pressing in on Jesus to hear the Word of God.

While it may seem that the world is losing interest in Jesus, I believe that people are longing to experience God today just as they did back then. But in Jesus’ day there was general agreement that God existed and that God’s prophets spoke God’s Word. We do not have the same foundations from which to build. The world today-- the world that Generations X, Y and younger have always known-- is in constant flux. Their lives and their worldviews are more fluid and less centered than ever. The number of activities and the development of technologies mean that hundreds of perspectives are in front of their eyes and at their fingertips every day.

I am convinced that God is behind much of this. God is constantly on the move in history and sees things from an infinite amount of perspectives. And a plural view of the world can lead to greater understanding and grace toward each other in our differences. Shared technology and ease of travel are connecting and bringing people of different cultures together. And is not reconciliation through grace and understanding which leads to unifying love and peace what God is all about in the world?

And yet, at the same time, people are also lost at sea in today’s world. Far too many do not know about or trust in a unifying presence. And yet their souls long to be anchored in something that transcends their fragmented lives. They are quote-unquote “connected” to family, friends, and extended networks of internet communities and yet there is a sense of disconnect— a lack of unity and over-arching purpose.

Jesus asked Peter to let the boat out a ways so that he could teach the crowds. We are the Peters and Pauls, the Marys and Marthas in today’s world. And I wonder if the church, after letting Jesus out to teach for centuries, have forgotten to put down the anchor? Has Jesus been drifting out into the lake-- so that people have a really hard time hearing and seeing him? Perhaps we too are on the shore, longing for a Word but unable to see or hear Christ out there or in here.

Rev. Barbara Brown Taylor writes, “Several years ago I was busy with Luke the physician. (The gospel-writer Luke was likely a doctor.) I wondered what it must have been like for him to leave his practice for the preaching life. The way I figure it, he did not stop carrying his black bag. He simply repacked it, taking out the scissors, scalpel and tincture of iodine to make room for the medicine of the gospel—those healing stories of God that did more to put people back together than all the potions in the world. There were beattitudes for the stricken and prophecies for the blind. There were instructions for the paralyzed and parables for the hard of hearing. There were acted out words for those who no longer trusted words and there was silence when all else had failed. All together Luke’s black bag of stories was quite an apothecary.” (from “Gospel Medicine”)

Like Luke and his bag, Peter had emptied his boat to make room for Jesus and the gospel medicine he taught. If we are having a hard time hearing or seeing, we probably have some unpacking to do. We may be working too hard as doctors or fishermen or fathers or businesswomen. We may need to unpack our busy lives and give time and space for God’s Word to enter in and fill us up.

But maybe you feel like Peter did after Jesus asked him to go out into the depths and throw out his nets once again. Peter replied, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”

Even though it may seem like you have done this or that with very little effect, will you put in a little more work, trusting that Jesus will provide what your soul needs? That’s what Peter did. ⁶When they let down their nets, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break.

I spent a day at Hollywood studios when I was down visiting my friend in Florida this last week. The main difference between Disneyworld and other amusement parks is they understand the power of narrative. On the Aerosmith Rock-n-roller coaster, the band invites you to follow them in a stretch limo to their concert. You move from the recording studio into the parking garage. There a limo roller coaster picks you up for a night ride across Los Angeles while you listen to “Dude Looks Like a Lady.”

On the Tower of Terror, you enter into a hotel room where you learn of a Hollywood actor and his family who got on an elevator in this same room and suddenly were transported into the Twilight Zone. You then step into the elevator yourself and journey through the Twilight Zone as well.

There is much to learn from Disney. God's narrative is unfolding all around us. And if we let the gospel stories fill our lives and give shape to our view of the world, we will re-discover God at the center of us and of all things. When the world feels dry and flat, God will be calling us out into The Kingdom Zone. When the world feels dizzying like a roller-coaster, we will be anchored near the shore listening to Jesus calm our worried minds. Once Peter got caught up in the abundance of God's kingdom, Jesus told him, "Don't be afraid. From now on, you will catch men and women."

It is only when we get caught up in God's love and start to recognize God at work in our lives and world that Jesus will be able to use us to catch others. Because when God catches us in his kingdom net, we start tossing out nets ourselves. We enact the Kingdom of God in the presence of others. And now more than ever, enactment is critical.

We were watching a video at my friends' church down which, like most Presbyterian churches, is struggling. Stanley Ott who must be in his 60s was urging churches to start catching up with the massive shift in culture that is taking place around us. One aspect of this shift is away from dogmatic understandings of truth into a pragmatic trust in experience. Now we do not get rid of doctrine or tradition which are our anchors. Nor do we say experience determines truth. But we must provide experiences or glimpses into God's kingdom which catch people's attention and draw them in to hear Christ's teachings that can center and ground their lives.

Now let us think briefly about the setting of Jesus' teaching. How beautiful it must have been for people to gather at the shore of a huge lake to hear God's Word. And then Peter lets Jesus is out a ways so that everyone can see and hear him. Of course, they also see blue lake with waves rippling and a boat with a sail flapping in the wind. The sun is dancing off the lake. There is so much movement and color. Jesus speaks for a while and sends Peter out in the boats. When the nets are let down, fish fill the boats and become a part of the scene. All of this is going on around God's Word. In the same way, our time gathered around God's Word must be so full of movement and beauty and truth and abundant love that people want to

become a part of it. So that they and we follow Christ and toss out a net of love which helps people to see how we are all one in him.

Barbara Brown Taylor reminds us of the breadth of this mission:

“There are a million ways to proclaim the good news: reading psalms to a sick friend, telling the truth to someone who has asked for it, ending a quarrel with words of forgiveness, writing a note that restores hope, listening to an old woman’s story, laughing at a young boy’s joke, inviting a stranger to come in—these are all proclamations of the good news. And if we are ever struck for ideas, we can remember all the ways good news has come to us, all the ways the medicine of the gospel has brought about our own healing.” (from “Gospel Medicine”)

Thanks be to God, Jesus is already out there on the lake— seeking out a couple of generations who are lost in some ways. But who also know, in surprising ways, the power of grace, service and change. Jesus is with them and is with us. And he wants all of us to know the story of God’s love which connects all things and peoples in one shared and fluid world.

If we are willing to let down any of the many nets mentioned by Rev. Taylor, God’s Word will not come back empty but will fulfill the purpose for which it was sent.

As the words to our next hymn point to, the world is hungry for God’s Word. All are invited to gather around and be filled by the God of all grace...who calls us to eternal union with Christ and to whom belongs all the glory now and forevermore .

