

Nothing but Net
By Rev. Todd Farnsworth
Luke 5: 1-11



One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret,[a] the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. 2 He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. 3 He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. 4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." 5 Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." 6 When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. 7 So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. 8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" 9 For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, 10 and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." 11 So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Last Sunday after worship Mary Alenstein informed me that all of the cool kids were creating Sea Shanty's online. Not wanting to be thought "uncool", and in deference to Mary's concern, I offer this little ditty...that I will later post on the internet:

I saw Jesus standing by Lake Gens-er-ett

The people had gathered, the good news to get.

When out on the water the fishermen cried,

“We’ve let down our nets and there’s nothing inside.”

We’ve let down our nets and there’s nothing inside.”

Then Jesus to Peter said, ‘try it my way’.

“Cast over the side and shout ‘hip hip hooray’-

For our God will provide and you’ll get what you get”

And when they pulled up they had filled up their net

And when they pulled up they had filled up their net.

Thank you, Mary.

I found it interesting that besides being one of the earliest proclamations of Jesus as “Lord”, Luke focuses on the nets of the disciples.

They are cleaning them

They are repairing them

They are drying them.

They are casting them

They are empty

They are full

They are left behind? (We'll get back to that...)

According to biblical historian [Ray Vander Laan](#), nets in the first century were usually made of linen cloth. The cloth had to be maintained, washed, dried, and repaired regularly. The cloth was woven together and stones (net weights) were attached to the bottom of the nets so that they would sink below the water. Cork was often attached to the tops of the nets so that they would not be lost.

The nets were tossed out onto the water, dragged along, and gathered on the shore to be emptied, cleaned, and repaired for the next excursion. Over and over the fishermen repeated this cycle until this day that Luke records when Jesus interrupts the flow.

I'd like to propose that on this day, Jesus becomes not only the Lord to these people, but he becomes their net. He equips them for a new job by offering them:

- Truth. Jesus teaches them about God's love for them and for all people. He tells them that there is a way of being in relationship with others that is not predicated on power or wealth. Jesus gives the fishermen concrete examples that provide weight to their proclamations. He speaks the truth about God so that they can too.
- Light. Jesus is the light of God that dries their nets and keeps them fresh. He shines into the darkest corners of humanity and says, "I see you. Come out of there and live as God intends you. Jesus' light brings healing to those who witness it. It is a light that the disciples are given to share with everyone who they encounter.

- Authority. Jesus fills his friends with the Holy Spirit who continues to sustain them, guide them, protect them, encourage them to do this new work that they are called to do. They do not have to speak out of their own wisdom, but they minister from a sacred connection with God. There is no need for costumes or props like the Pharisees have relied on, the disciples can be themselves in relationship with the Holy, and that is enough to spread the Good News.
- Faith. It is this Good News that Jesus teaches/lives with the fishermen that soaks into their bones and strengthens their understanding of God. They do not have to insist on their own way to make a point, but they learn to reflect from a higher power on what is right and wrong, healthy and unhealthy, faithful and unfaithful.

This is the new net that the fishermen are given to use as they cast out upon humanity to bring people toward Jesus. And like the linen lattices they used, it turns out that it's important to tend to this net. There are ways in which this net can be weakened if not looked after.

- This net can get caught on the snags of lies and conspiracy theories that people put forth. We've seen that happen in the workings of Q-Anon and the trolls who cast doubt on facts by suggesting alternatives to reality.
- This net can get tangled in selfishness and greed. We witness people wanting their own way so that they can profit, so that they can repeat rewards for themselves at the expense of those who are vulnerable in our society.
- This net can be weighed down with barnacles of personal privilege and a need for power over other people. We observe the chafing

created by those who believe that there is a scarcity to God's glory and care. They want it all for themselves to wield over others and cry crocodile tears of outrage when someone with little or none is afforded an opportunity for some.

We see and feel the strain these things cause to the net we cast. They create holes in the holy care that we seek to provide as people look at us with suspicion and disdain.

Nonetheless, we must keep fishing! Peopling!

Like the disciples before us we must expect that repairs are a daily task, a nightly ritual, and get to it.

- Jesus has given us the tools to loosen the lies of those who would spread suspicion and distrust. It's called: Truth.
- Jesus has given us the tools to untangle self-centeredness and selfishness. It's called Authority.
- Jesus has given us the tools to de-stress the strains of wielding advantages over others and desiring dominance for our personal gain. It's called Faith.
- Jesus bathes all of our efforts in the Light of his love that informs our caring and casting in his name.

It reminds me of a song I used to sing:

I saw Jesus standing by Briarcliff yet

The people had gathered, the good news to get.

When out in the churchyards the weary folks cried,

“We’ve let down our nets and there’s nothing inside.”

We’ve let down our nets and there’s nothing inside.”

Then Jesus to us said, ‘now try it my way’.

With Faith, Truth, Authority, Lighting your day--

For our God will provide and you’ll get what you get”

And when we pulled up we had filled up our net

And when we pulled up we had filled up our net.

Luke’s story reminds us that there are always elements that will put strain on the nets we cast. Jesus has given us ways to care for, to tend to, to repair what is broken. Let us be about that work as we fish for people, in the name of our Lord. Amen.