

Luke 5:1-11 Catching People
February 6, 2022

One of the well-known scenes described one way or another in all four gospels involves the recruitment of disciples, by Jesus, in the early days of his public career. “Disciples” refers to those who learn by discipline. They are students who submit to the authority of their teacher. There are a number of interesting features to the way the disciples of Jesus came together.

One of these features is that *he* chose *them*, whereas in most cases, the students chose the teacher. Plato and Aristotle, two of the most well-known of the ancient teachers, both had “schools,” and their students came to them, seeking *them* out. Jesus went *to* his prospective disciples. That notion is a part of a whole theology, centered around the idea of election. It means God has chosen us, chosen you, like Jesus chose Peter and Andrew, James and John.

Another feature that stands out regards the people Jesus chose. They did not seem to be at the top of their class. They were not so much at the bottom either. Just not the kind of people one would expect to get chosen, just people, like everyone else.

In this case they were professional fishermen, running small businesses around the Sea of Galilee. This means that they were down to earth, not too hard to imagine. They may have been ornery cusses, but we can sometimes be that ourselves. Modern day

analogies might be; truck driver, plumber, school teacher, computer tech, nurse, people you find anywhere. We all know people like this and even though we might not envision them as Saints and Apostles, it means something that they were chosen from the, “ordinary,” among us.

Finally, he made for them an analogy of their vocation. After preaching to the congregation from one their boats, set off a little from the shoreline, with the people sitting on the land, he told them to put out into the deep water. In a scene reminiscent of the resurrection appearance in the 21st chapter of the Gospel of John, he told them to let down their nets.

After a fruitless night in which they had caught nothing, their catch was so great that they had trouble taking it in. They had to have help from other boats, all of which began to sink. In both cases, the one here in Luke’s gospel and the scene in John, it is Peter that becomes the focus of attention. There, Jesus uses the great catch to restore Peter to his good graces after the debacle of the denials. Here, Peter fell at the feet of Jesus, “Get away from me Lord, I am a sinful man.”

Then comes the analogy. Jesus told Peter not to be afraid, that from then on he would “catch men,” is the way it reads in the NIV translation of Luke’s account. Given the egalitarian social developments of the last couple hundred years, it is probably better if we translate it, “catch people,” for that is what it means.

Catching people has been part of the church's identity from the very beginning. It represents the evangelistic part of the church's mission. It certainly involves one of the more noteworthy scenes in this tradition about Jesus, the calling of the disciples.

In both Mark and Matthew Jesus told his disciples that he would make them, "fishers of men," and because of the same social circumstances that applied to the Lukan words, it would be better to translate it, "fishers of people."

It is at least interesting that Luke changes the nuance. I had ever noticed it before. He doesn't emphasize the fishing part, which is something people do on purpose. They go fishing. Catching is another matter. Like Peter and James and John, one can fish all night and catch nothing.

In Matthew and Mark Jesus tells his new disciples that they will be fishers of people, emphasizing their intentional actions. In Luke, he tells them that they will catch people, emphasizing the part that is less under their control. There is a bit of mystery involved. Sometimes the fish don't bite no matter how hard one tries or what kind of bait one uses. Other times, they fish jump into the boat.

If I may digress on this point a little. Personally, I am not impressed with some of the church's fishing expeditions. Some reflect the phenomenon of trying too hard. Some involved the use of force. Others have been pretty hard sell, high pressure. I guess I agree

with my millennial generation brothers and sisters who don't like focus groups, marketing strategies, and formulaic programs.

What does impress me, where it is found, and it is found, is what happens when people are caught in the act of being human in the best sense of the word. When they are caught living lives of integrity, kindness, generosity, honesty, courage, and love; when I meet people who are gratuitously, that is, free of charge, without agenda; joyful, hopeful, peaceful; I hate to use the word "authentic," because it is misunderstood by overuse; then I am impressed and willing to be caught. If I was not already a believer, I would be more inclined when people are just interested in me and not interested in me because they have something in mind that they want me to do.

In Luke, Jesus told Peter, "you will catch people," rather than, "you will fish for them." I am glad that he did. It is a call to sacred living, to living the best representation of our truest selves. Of course, some other time I might have to come to terms with what it means that in Matthew and Mark, Jesus told them they would be fishers of people, but that is for another time.

This is not *only* a call to sacred living. It is a *prediction* of it, that after all is said and done, after life has had its way, and we have been around the block a few times, with the Spirit as our guide; *we will catch people.*