

Fishers of Men and Women

Why does Jesus choose fishermen to be his disciples? One would think that Jesus would want to recruit movers and shakers, well networked people, articulate, well educated, like learned philosophy professors. But no. The first disciples he calls are fishermen.

Is it just a coincidence or could there be something about what it takes to be a good fisherman that will make them good fishers of men and women? Now I do not fish myself, but I once watched a movie about guys fishing. BA River Runs Through ItBset in Missoula, which actually does portray fly fishing as an analogy for the spiritual life. What struck me from that movie, is that fishing takes patience. Nothing much is happening, other than doing the same thing over and over again, the same graceful motion back and forth, casting over the waters. It also takes being still, becoming one with the river, so to speak. For it takes being able to read the waters, an ability to see the life below the surface. To see where the fish are biting, to know what the fish are biting.

I suspect we would all prefer to have God call us the way he calls Isaiah in today=s first reading. A vision of the Lord seated on his throne, the ground trembling beneath our feet, clouds of incense filling the room, and angels hovering overhead, chanting, AHoly, Holy, Holy.@ Such a call could strengthen the weakest backbone. After such a call, who would not drop everything and devote the rest of their life to following God=s will?

But God is more apt to call us the wayJesus calls these fishermen. Jesus suggests they do once more what they have already been doing all night to no avail. But when they do it at his inspiration, they find that their daily routine yields surprising, even wondrous results. Now even the wonder though can take the right kind of eye to notice. Its not some surreal apocalyptic vision, the moon does not fall from the sky, the sun does not dance, its only a bunch of fish. But Peter, James and John are no less struck with awe at the sight, than was Isaiah in the temple, for they know about fish and they know such a haul is not of their own doing.

If we are to hear God=s call in our own daily interactions with one another, we need to watch with the attention and patience of a fisherman. We need to stay still to glimpse those signs of life beneath the surface of things. We need to wait, ready to respond the moment we feel the tug of greater life on our line.

Patience, attentiveness, stillnessBwe are not trained in these virtues by our high tech, high speed world. Multitasking diffuses our attention, efficiency is the very antithesis of patience. Too

often we use our smartphones and tablets, or laptops and televisions to fill the empty spaces between our activities. If we are to ever see Christ, hear his call to us, we will need to unencumber ourselves from all this busy-ness, at least from time to time. To give Christ a chance to reveal himself to us, we will need to schedule time for it too, adding one more activity that is actually a kind of non-activity, what the Chinese call *wu wei*, acting by not *acting*, but *being still*, attentive, patient, observant, mindful, to ponder and reflect, to cast an eye over the swirling waters, to spy new life below the surface, and to learn what's biting.

Jesus too works more like a fisherman than a mover and a shaker. He rejects the devils offer to be king of the world. Rather he spends his time more in listening than in talking, more in being than in doing. God creates by giving us the space to re-create ourselves. God loves us by teaching us the slow art of loving others, and in so doing he schools us ever so gently in how to love ourselves. It is through the devotion of such time and attention that the spirit of God hovers over the watery chaos as in the first lines of Genesis, and draws forth new life, our life from the watery deep. May we all learn how to become fishers of men and women, children and strangers, of everyone, even ourselves.