

Mending our nets
Mark 1: 14-20

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Have you even noticed that one third of Jesus' disciples were fishermen? It could be more since we don't know the profession of all of them. I was intrigued by writer Peter Woods from the blog, *The Listening Hermit*¹, who suggested that fishermen had qualities that Jesus desired in his disciples. Was there something in the skill set of fishermen that made for good disciples? The patience? The need to observe the depths? Being able to be in tune with the elements? These are all qualities that would serve disciples well as they follow their call to share the Good News of Jesus Christ in the world. One of my colleagues in her sermon² points out another skill that fishermen have that would apply to discipleship and that is the mending of nets. Perhaps the mending of nets was exactly the sort of experience Jesus was looking for when he saw James, son of Zebedee and his brother John and called them to be his disciples/

Have you ever tried to repair a fishing net? I suspect it is a time consuming process which takes much attention and patience. If it isn't done, then the whole purpose of going out to fish is undermined. The breaks in the nets cannot be ignored. I began to think about how not mending our nets undermines our discipleship.

Discipleship is what Jesus calls us to do – to follow in the ways of Jesus Christ and to go out and share the love of God with the world. We are to tell of our experience of how living life with Jesus shores us up and carries us through life no matter what we may face. We are to share how we are nurtured and transformed by our prayer, our reading of scripture, our participation in a faith community, our service to others and our fighting for justice. If we do not mend our nets – our relationships with one another then those opportunities to do that sharing are lost.

As I approached this Sunday after the Inauguration, I thought back to the Sunday after the Inauguration 4 years ago. Our country was deeply divided then and is still deeply divided today – maybe more so. Four years ago, I had just returned from Washington DC after attending the Women's March the day before. I remember being amazed at all the different people who came together at the Women's March. We weren't of one mind. There were signs being carried that opposed one another, but those who were there for that march were together for that moment. For me this was hope that those who didn't agree, who were divided, could still come together.

Looking at the state of our country today, I wonder how much progress we have made from 4 years ago. How well have we tended to mending our nets? I think some work has been done, but a lot has not. In four years, the Sunday after the inauguration are we going to be in the same place. Yes - mending nets takes time and dedicated effort. Are we willing to give time, even more time than we initially imagine to the work of mending relationships? I think that we must. We are a quick fix society. If it doesn't seem possible or that it will take too long, we move on. We work around the problem – even ignore it. Working on mending our nets is part of our work as Christians. Christ came to reconcile this world and his work is our work. It is beautifully summed up in our catechism's description of the ministry of the lay persons.

¹ <https://thelisteninghermit.com/2012/01/18/hooking-up-with-jesus/>

² Rev. Phyllis Spiegel, Third Sunday after Epiphany, Jan. 24, 2021, St. Anne's West Chester, OH

The ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church.

How can we get started with this reconciliation? It is a question I have been asking myself for quite awhile. It is one I've discussed with the vestry, our discipleship team (The Way of St. Paul) and other groups. This past week I heard about a way that gave me hope. It is called – From Many, one: Conversations across difference³.

It is simple. Have a conversation with one other person with both sharing their answers to the following questions.

1. What do you love?
2. What have you lost?
3. Where does it hurt?
4. What do you dream?

You might say – how are those questions going to help us resolve our differences? They don't even mention our differences. Indeed they don't, but again this business of mending the nets is a slow process. These questions will allow us to listen to one another, to get to know one another, and to build intentional relationship in a time when many feel the only option is to not say much at all because it doesn't feel safe.

I will share with you my answers do you get an idea of how it might go.

- I love that my main work is to help people find and nurture their relationship with Jesus Christ and go out to do the same with others.
- I have lost seeing people I love on a regular basis – members of St. Peter's, my family and friends.
- It hurts that we as America are divided and that many are so fed up they don't even want to try talking about it.
- I dream that we do start talking and that we find common ground to go out and do Jesus' work even if we disagree.

Imagine sharing your answers to these questions with someone and listening to their answers. In these life-changing conversations, we can begin to discover how our differences make us stronger as the human family of God and find that common ground that Jesus calls us to. In that common ground we will find the work that Jesus is calling us to do.

I introduced these questions to the Way of St. Paul Team last Thursday evening and they were intrigued. They are working on ways to have these conversations in our congregation, but if you find the questions intriguing, you don't need to wait. You can take those 4 questions and find a neighbor, a family member or a friend and invite them to try them out with you. See what happens. Do they mention Christ? No. Do they mention reconciliation? No.

³ <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/from-many-one/>

What these questions do is build relationship especially with those we have not been able to talk to. They strengthen the net and on that net is built our work as disciples – to share the love of God with the world.