

Nets vs. Hooks
February 4, 2007
(Epiphany 5 - Year C)
Luke 5: 1-11

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus says to Simon Peter, the fisherman:
“Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.”
Even though they had been fishing all night long, catching nothing, the
fishermen did just what Jesus said to, and they caught so many fish
that their nets began to break.

Then, Jesus says to Simon Peter:
“Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.”

Whenever we hear this story about the fishermen on the sea of Galilee,
we can think about images of fishing:
Images of waking up early, getting our bait and lures and tackle boxes
ready, making sure we have our rod and reel.
We bait the hook, cast the reel, and then, we wait.
We wait and wait and wait,
Until we feel the line tug.
Then, reeling in, we hope that we have caught a fish onto the hook.
With a sense of smug accomplishment, we bring that fish out of the
water, with a hook stuck in his mouth.

This is the type of fishing that I imagine when I think of fishing.
I think of rods and reels and lures, all designed to catch one fish at a time
with a hook.

Yet, if you listen carefully to the Gospel of Luke, there is no mention of
rods or reels or lures.
There is no mention of just one fish.
There is no mention of hooks.

However, in the Gospel of Luke, there *is* mention of many, many fish,
who are caught, but not by hooks.
There are many fish who are gathered up in nets, so many fish that the

nets begin to break.

Peter and James and John were all commercial fishermen who became disciples for Jesus.

Peter and James and John fished for a living, not for sport.

And, Peter and James and John did not use hooks to pierce the mouth of a single fish at a time, but they used a net to gather in many fish.

And, then, Jesus says to Simon Peter:

“Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.”

For many years, we have used hooks to catch people for Jesus.

We have deceived them by fashioning and tying fancy lures.

We have baited a tasty worm onto the end, to disguise our barbed hooks.

We have reeled people in on the end of our hooks, so that they come out of the water wounded, and betrayed and devalued.

Yet, if you look at the original Greek words that Luke used in his

Gospel, Luke *does not* say to Simon Peter:

“From now on, you will be a fisher of people.”

In the original Greek language, Jesus says this:

“From now on, you will gather in people, alive.”

Rather than killing people, one by one, on the end of a hook,

Jesus asks that we gather people in: in nets, in groups, alive.

When I was a freshman in college, I was probably pretty unusual in that I continued to attend church almost every Sunday.

As a college student, I worshiped in an Episcopal Church that I had found, away from campus.

At that time in my life, I had been fueled in my spirituality by profound experiences in my high school church youth group.

In college, I was a committed Christian, of the Episcopalian flavor.

At the end of the hall in my dorm, was this guy who was a senior, who was one of the coolest guys in the dorm.

I don't remember his name, but everyone in the dorm knew that he was

very involved in one of the Christian groups on campus.

One day, this guy asked if he could stop by my room and we could share our faith together.

I told him that that would be great.

However, within a few minutes after he had arrived at my room, I realized that he had not come to visit so that we could *share* our faith.

But, that he had come to convert me to *his* flavor of Christianity.

He had little knowledge of the Episcopal Church, so I showed him my Book of Common Prayer that I used.

He scoffed at this book, saying that the pre-written prayers were not prayers from the heart.

He told me that if I would repent of my sins, then and there, and accept Jesus in my heart, that I would be saved.

However, I knew that I had *already* accepted Jesus in my heart.

And, I felt as if I were a fish, a fish who had been lured in, now struggling on the end of the line, with a hook firmly implanted into my cheek.

Many of us have had negative experiences, experiences such as the one I had in college.

Many of us have had negative experiences of having our faith devalued and disrespected,

Experiences that make us hear the word “evangelism” and run the other way.

But, make no mistake about it, Jesus does not excuse us from fishing for people.

Jesus simply asks us that we do not wound them with a hook,

But, that we graciously use a net, to gather a multitude of people into loving and understanding arms.

Now, I would like for you to think back into your past.

Sometime, somehow, you came to St. Alban’s for the first time.

Maybe it was last week, or maybe it was 50 years ago, or maybe, for

some of you, your parents brought you here as a small child.
Sometime, somehow, you were invited, graciously and freely, to come
into this net that we call St. Alban's Episcopal Church.

I hope that you were not wounded with a hook.
But, if you were dragged in, I hope that those wounds have healed.

I hope that each of you feel that you have been gathered graciously into
the net.

And, I hope, for Jesus' sake, that you have had such a positive response
to being gathered into God's net, with everyone here, that you will
invite other people into this net, as well.

For, one of the wonderful things about the Episcopal Church is that we
don't catch fish with a hook, and then throw the fish back into the
water that we don't want.

In this Church, we catch all sorts and conditions of people.

For, our net is filled with minnows and salmon and trout and catfish, and
even the occasional shark.

In the days to come, I hope that you will not get out your tackle box to
hook someone in the mouth, for Jesus' sake.

I hope that you will put out into the deep water and let down your nets,
to gather in and to love, all sorts and conditions of people, giving
them hope and a reason for new life.

For, on the sea of Galilee, Jesus says to Simon Peter, the fisherman:
"Do not be afraid.

From now on, you will gather in people, alive."

And, Jesus says to us, today:

Put out into the deep water, and let down your gracious nets.

AMEN.

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