

Meditation
February 10, 2018
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“We tried it before, and it didn’t work.”

The words are out of Simon’s mouth before he even has a chance to think about them.

“We tried – we were up all night fishing, but we didn’t catch a thing.”

This scene comes after Jesus has done what he always has done – he has gathered people together. They come together, forming a kind of ad hoc community, and Jesus hops into Simon’s boat, pushes out away from shore, and speaks to them.

The story doesn’t tell us what he talked about, but maybe he talked about God’s dream for the world – a world of justice and peace. Maybe he talked about fishing – about having enough fish for everyone to eat. Maybe he talked about how much God loves them. Maybe he talked about how they – the common folk – were blessed.

And he wasn’t just speaking – he was teaching them. Those of us here who are, or who have been, teachers, know that teaching is way more than talking at someone. Real teaching and learning is a total-body experience – actually, a total-community experience. Real learning happens when change happens, and Jesus is teaching them to be focal points of change in the world.

I can imagine that the crowd listened with rapture. And in their hearts, change was going on, and they were beginning to understand what it means to reach for a world of justice and peace. To dream with Jesus of a world in which everyone has enough to eat. To feel the love of God for all of the earth and its creatures, and to know that they are blessed.

And then it is time for it to be real.

In the hush that follows, Jesus turns to Simon, and says, “Put out into deep water, and let your nets down for a catch.”

That’s when Simon says it. Those words that he wishes he could get back, but they’re out before he knows it: “We tried it before, and it didn’t work.”

Truth be told, these words are part of a dynamic duo of shut-downs for the work of the church. Here’s the dynamic duo that can shoot any church in the foot. Variations of these two things:

1. “We tried it before, and it didn’t work.”
2. “Years ago, when so-and-so was here, we used to do [this], and the church was just a-boomin’!”

But when Jesus looked Simon in the eye, and instructed him to push his boat out into the water, he wasn’t talking about the past. He wasn’t asking what they had tried and what had failed. He wasn’t asking what used to work in the past.

Jesus was looking at the path ahead of them. With God's dream for the world in his heart, he was pushing them towards a tomorrow that was full of promise, and full of work and full of the love of God lived out in the world.

As it turns out, Simon quickly realizes his mistake, and says, "OK, if you say so, we'll go fishing again."

I'm not sure if his heart was in it, but Simon takes that faithful step.

He takes a chance, calls the gang, and they go fishing.

Of course, there are so many fish that it almost becomes comical – the boat almost sinks with the wriggly evidence of their success.

Beloved Community, we have been looking back at the year that has passed, and looking forward to the years ahead. Truth be told, there have been some times when the dynamic duo of church shut-downs have reared their heads. But let me say this, in the 8 ½ years that I've been here, the words of "we tried it before and it didn't work" or "years ago, when so-and-so was here" have never stopped the ministry in this church. They have never stifled the vision that you've held before you.

Even if those words and feelings have slipped out, like Simon, this community has taken the risk, and let the nets down into the water. Over and over again, the community has taken the chance of trying new things, or trying again. This is your gift, and your blessing.

Jesus does not let the fishermen rest on their laurels, nor does he belabour the point about their wondrous catch of fish. Instead, he points them outward, again, to new lands, and new work.

"Don't be afraid. From now on, you'll be catching people."

It's as if to say, "You think that was good? Look what I have for you now!"

What does it take for people to leave everything, like the fishermen did, and follow Jesus? What does it take to move beyond the "we tried that" and the "we used to"?

What vision of new life compelled them to turn from the past, and head out into the future?

Antoine de Saint-Exupery once said, "If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea."

Jesus was teaching them to long for the sea – to long for the dream of God. And so they went.

What vision is before you, now, Beloved Community? Do you long for God's sea of justice? Do you dream of this church being a focal point of change in the world?

Are you hearing the words of Jesus, bidding you to follow?

What lies ahead? Perhaps it is time for you to let down your nets, and see.