

Sermon Preached at the Church of the Holy Trinity, Philadelphia
Sunday January 25th, 2009
by the Reverend Alan Neale
“Nets - Cast Them or Mend Them”

In the film, *What About Bob?*, Bob (Bill Murray) explains to Dr. Leo Marvin (Richard Dreyfus) why his wife left him. Bob explains, “There are two types of people in this world: Those who like Neil Diamond, and those who don't. My ex-wife loves him.” After listening to Bob's explanation, Dr. Leo Marvin responds by saying, “I see. So, what you're saying is that even though you are an almost-paralyzed, multiphobic personality who is in a constant state of panic, your wife did not leave you, you left her because she... liked Neil Diamond?”. There is even a blog entitled TATTOPITW...

Generally all this simplistic “*jibber jabber*” (one of my current favourite phrases from Boston Legal) about “two types of person” is often merely an excuse for sloppy thinking and irrational behaviour. Perhaps it's true, as George Carlin, commented, “There are two types of people... those who think there are two types of people and those who don't” and yet...

In today's Gospel (Mark 1: 14-20) we see that Jesus calls two types of person - he calls Peter and Andrew (v.16) as they were “casting their nets into the sea” and then (v. 19) he calls the brothers James and John as they were “mending their nets”.

There are those who cast nets and, it seems, those who mend them!

“Those who cast nets” - Peter and Andrew are good poster-boys for this task. They always have an eye for the newcomer, for opportunities for growth, for “pushing the envelope” (and from where, please, does that phrase come but anyway...). We know about Peter - his pushy, bold, honest character. It's Peter who first brings Andrew to Christ, it's Peter who tries to direct Christ's itinerary and it's Peter who, on the first day of Pentecost, stands up in Jerusalem and shares the Gospel. But what about Andrew? Well, we know that Philip (one of the earliest called of the disciples) came from Andrew's village (John 1:44) and I can imagine Andrew talking often about his new-found Messiah and Lord at home. It's Andrew, in John 6:8, who pushes the young boy forward with his few fish and suggests that, perhaps, Jesus can use these to feed 5000 and more and it's Andrew (John 12:22) who encourages and accompanies Philip and goes with to tell Jesus about “the Greeks” who were honest and spiritual inquirers.

And **“those who mend nets”** - seems to me that while Peter and Andrew are often “working the crowds/pumping the flesh/looking for opportunities” to grow in numbers... James and John men of the institution, committees and organization. They are the ones who push Jesus for some sort of organizational chart, a hierarchy of responsibility when he... retires! It is James who is profoundly, deeply involved in the early controversies of the church (Acts 15). He wants to find a way forward, a compromise... a via media, a way to co-exist. And, of course, it is James and John who when they feel the nascent institution is being threatened, ridiculed, pushed to the sidelines... they suggest the rather drastic remedy, “Oh... call down fire from heaven and destroy them all”. The things people do sometime to protect their cherished institutions... and, sometimes (how sick!), all in the Name of Christ!

The church, this church, needs people who know how to “mend nets” and those who know how to “cast nets” - take a few moments after the service and wander around the tables set up for our first “Ministry Fair” (“What In God’s Name Am I Doing Here?”)... and, as you wander, reflect as you come to each of the 25 areas of ministry... has this to do with “casting nets” or “mending nets”. Or as the Vestry reviews the 2009 Budget, it will be salutary for us to reflect... how much is spent “casting nets” and how much is spent “mending nets”.

This colossal “net” of an edifice has almost an insatiable hunger for “mending” - how best can we also use it for “casting”? In “mending” mode all we need do is keep the doors closed and open occasionally for worship; in “casting” mode we seek to be brave and risk-taking, imaginative and audacious in using this edifice to extend the kingdom. An “edifice complex” need not be harmful... though it generally is!

And then, let’s be bold, let’s take a moment to reflect on our lives... each of us reflecting on our own lives! Are we becoming constrained, constricted, trammled into “mending mode”? Have we been hurt so much, disappointed so often, grieved so deeply, resented so sorely... that we are stuck in “mending mode”? God has a new tune to which He wishes us to dance... it’s time to cast nets!

In 1983 Billy Joel wrote “*And So It Goes*” (it was subsequently released six years later). In the song, Mr. Joel writes:

*In every heart there is a room
A sanctuary safe and strong
To heal the wounds from lovers past
Until a new one comes along*

*But if my silence made you leave
Then that would be my worst mistake
So I will share this room with you
And you can have this heart to break*

*And every time I’ve held a rose
It seems I only felt the thorns
And so it goes, and so it goes
And so will you soon I suppose*

*And this is why my eyes are closed
Its just as well for all I’ve seen
And so it goes, and so it goes
And you’re the only one who knows*

There does come a time when our Lord, the only one who truly knows, calls us from defensive, introspective “mending” mode to having an eye open, a heart open and a mind open to share our hearts and lives no matter what the past pain has been!

It has been said of many an institution (churches not excluded!) - “nothing keeps this place going like inertia” - let that not be said of this church, of your life nor of mine!

Today the Lord sets before us a choice... cast the nets or mend the nets. He does not, and will not ever, call us to “store the nets”. These “nets” of our lives are for use... they will be strained, sometimes torn but they will always be healed. They are not for storage and they are surely not intended for dust and cobwebs.

“Jesus calls us! By thy mercies, Saviour, may we hear Thy call, give our hearts to Thine obedience, serve and love Thee best of all.” Amen.