

Let Down Your Nets

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February 9, 2025

Fifth Sunday After Epiphany

Luke 5:1-11

They were bone tired. They had worked all night and had caught almost nothing, and then along came this guy, who

wasn't even a fisherman, and he urged them to again let down their nets. Even though they knew it was totally futile, these future disciples did as Jesus asked, and were rewarded with more fish than their nets could hold.

While they certainly celebrated the catch, they first had to deal with their doubts and fears. This morning we're going to wrestle with that groaning, grumbling and disbelief, and touch a wee bit on family drama right here at Seekers Church. I will be drawing upon my personal assumptions, projections, and generalizations.

Though seldom acknowledged, it comes as no surprise that here at Seekers, some of us are "outies" and some of us are "innies." Some of us are "outies" and some of us are "innies." That's OK. It's a good thing really. This dynamic that exists within our family is sometimes awkward, hard to talk about and occasionally even confrontational. But this morning and amidst the unfolding chaos, I'm inviting us to acknowledge it, bring it to the light, celebrate it, see it as a strength and unite us to confront the hate currently spewing forth around us.

The roots of this dynamic are deep. With a bow to the writings of Elizabeth O'Connor, traditionally, Church of the Savior communities have been founded upon and have enjoyed the stability of a "three-legged stool." The first leg, the "inward journey" supports mindfulness and personal spiritual growth. It also strengthens the second leg, the "outward journey" of active mission and service beyond our doors. The third leg, "community" supports both the inward journey and the outward journey. When all three legs are strong and of equal length, the stool is balanced and we can sit on it comfortably. Absent that balance, our butts may begin to slide.

From my perspective, the strongest leg here at Seekers is community. We have invested deeply in community life; our time, our physical and intellectual talents, our financial resources. We've shared worship, food, intimate secrets of our lives, our joys and sorrows, our personal journeys both inward and outward. We speak often and eloquently about our community, and Marjory's amazing books and articles have shared our community story widely. We've done well. The community leg of the Seekers stool is straight and strong.

Decades ago, in our early days, Seekers was an outlier among C of S communities. Unlike most of the others, we did not have a single, driving, corporate mission. Rather we focused most of our energy on supporting families, children, and a wider range of missions including, FLOC, Hope and a Home and especially supporting the individual calls of Seekers members. Those missions included social services; housing; juvenile justice and safety; international development; services to help students succeed; environmental advocacy; services supporting our military families; and quality health care for older people and people with disabilities. Many of these calls and missions were full-time jobs and we looked to our mission groups and the broader Seekers community for wisdom, solace and support.

Obviously, and as we have aged, our calls have evolved. There are of course exceptions, but many of us have retired, and fewer of us dedicate 40+ hours a week to those individual calls. We travel less and work less in pursuit of those calls. Our relationships to the organizations, people and daily challenges of those calls are now more arm's length and less frequent.

Still, the Seekers community remains an amazing conglomeration of talented, experienced and committed people. We offer our energy, voices and finances to a wide range of causes. We are artists, poets, musicians, mediators, pastors, historians, educators, theologians, therapists, reconcilers, advocates and

care-givers.

- We work to: protect our water, air and land; address global warming; promote regenerative agriculture; protect the land, rights and welfare of America's indigenous people; support people wrestling with addictions and mental health; examine and support reparations for America's theft of truth, power and money.
- We work to: defend the rights and welfare of immigrants; pursue justice in Gaza, Haiti, Ukraine and other foreign lands; deliver life-saving medical services; provide for the unhoused; support the welfare of animals and promote vegetarianism and veganism.
- We work to: acknowledge and atone for America's legacy of discrimination and racial violence; support to LGBTQ+ people; address police violence and the injustices of our legal and incarceration systems; address issues of aging and dignified dying. Apologies for undoubtedly missing some of our important causes, and let's not forget our very generous domestic and international giving programs.

Each and every one of these calls is an essential and vital part of God's work in the world. I'm going to pause for a moment to acknowledge that each and every one of these calls for good is currently under threat. These calls that used to be merely challenging and overwhelming are now targets of a fire hose of hate, racism, idolatry, retribution and vindictiveness. The sheer volume of stuff shouting for our attention seems to exponentially increase from Sunday to Sunday ... and shows no sign of slowing down.

In the face of all that cruelty and malice, we Jesus-informed Christians and members of Seekers Church, are called to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves. How can and how

should we, God's hands and agents on this earth, mobilize our considerable talents in response, supporting God's work in the world?

While there are multiple answers to that question, this morning, I want to focus on some of us being innies and some of us being outies. Given the onslaught of crises, pain and turmoil besieging us every day, some of us are ready to take to the streets, write our elected officials, carry signs and denounce the devil. Others confront those same fears and challenges by seeking quiet, contemplation, serenity, poetry and prayer. Last week Anne Lamott spoke for many of us when she wrote "Along with half of America, I have been feeling doomed, exhausted and quiet." She continued, "Now is a time of quiet. A passionate activist friend told me she doesn't feel very resisty yet..."

How we respond is mainly a function of who we are. Each of us is different, and sometimes those differences extend right here into our worship. Reflecting upon our worship for a moment, see if either of these statements rings true for you. The first statement goes something like this: "It's just too much. I come to church to renew and recharge and sometimes it seems that all I hear are downer messages about what's wrong with the world or wrong with my faith." Or perhaps this one: "On Sundays, I really value the quiet of our prayer time and digging into scriptures, yet I struggle to see how that inward work advances progress on real-world issues and on Seekers' commitment to racial, ethnic and social justice."

Seekers can and generally does hold both at the same time. We all want our worship to be a place of warmth, welcome, comfort and renewal. Additionally, and concurrently, we also need our worship to be a voice of conscience and a place of accountability and encouragement for action.

It will come as no surprise to any of you that I struggle with the inward journey while other Seekers feel quite drawn to

it. I was tempted to actually do this exercise, but instead I'll just ask you to imagine it. Envision a straight line running diagonally across the sanctuary, from the corner where the closet is to the opposite corner. The end of the line nearest the closet is labeled "mostly focused on the inward journey" while the other end is labeled "mostly focused on the outward journey." Now take a moment to sincerely and honestly envision where you would stand on that line. Where do you think other Seekers would stand?

Elizabeth O'Connor writes "Strength for the 'outward journey' proceeds from the discipline of our 'inner journey' and each enriches the other." Both the "inward" and "outward" are vital and balance between them is essential. Most of us however, face the challenge of keeping both journeys in balance. It is really difficult and, because each of us is human with different strengths, weaknesses and proclivities, it's not surprising that some of us are innies and some are outies. We simply don't have sufficient time or energy to honor both without neglecting one in favor of the other.

We are not alone in wrestling with this tension. This morning's gospel reminds us that Jesus too struggled to balance the inward and the outward. Just as he did when he climbed into Simon's boat, he often had to separate himself from the crowds and find some solace and restoration... And then he got back to work.

I'm a baby boomer who was adamantly opposed to our wars in Viet Nam, Iraq and Afghanistan. My career and call engaged America's soft-power to provide humanitarian assistance and promote global health, economic development, literacy and stronger democracies around the world. I was traumatized by 9/11. I also know my country's dark history of ethnic cleansing and chattel slavery. And yet, never before in my three quarters of a century, have I ever felt so ashamed of my government's leaders, so scared for my neighbors and my country, and never before have I been so scared for the

vulnerable people and countries around the world who now are targets of my country's racism, ravenous greed, hate, and evil use of power. Never before have I believed that my country was actively provoking a coup against Jesus's commandment to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves.

Today, February 2025, we can and must work together. All are valued and all are needed. Regardless of where we fall on that line, each and every one of us has made a personal and sincere commitment to do God's work in the world and to follow Jesus' commandments to love God and to love our neighbors.

How then can we and how should we mobilize our considerable talents in response and in supporting God's work? Resistance comes in many shapes and colors. It need not be loud and hostile. Looking around us and right now, neighbors are quietly conducting "Know Your Rights" training; delivering diapers and groceries to food banks; exploring the concept of sanctuary; keeping their heads down and delivering antiretroviral medications. Might Seekers Church want to organize an interfaith service of concern and hope?

Particularly amidst this assault, we cannot readily solve all the world's problems, but collectively we can acknowledge them, agonize about them and struggle with them. We each do what we can and what we feel called to do. And, in doing God's work in the world, we all need daily doses of rest, awe and beauty. It's all needed and all valued.

Like the disciples, we share lots of doubts about whether it's worth the effort; how and whether we can make a difference. Do I really have faith? Will my marching or my signing this petition make any difference? Do my prayers and contemplation really mobilize God's actions on behalf of the vulnerable and the oppressed? I believe that Jesus knew what he was doing when he stepped into Simon's boat, and he was not surprised by their groaning and lack of faith.

Discerning and living out God's call is deep within C of S and Seekers' traditions and DNA and it is central to Jesus's commandment to do the work of the world by loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves. Yes, some of us are innies and some of us are outies, but as children of God and agents of God, we are all now needed in this work and we can help each other. We all can envision a more positive future. Working together, we can find balance; we can blend our strengths and compensate for our weaknesses.

Yes, we are facing a tidal wave of tumult and already we are tired, but have faith! There are fish to catch. Let down your nets.