

Having said “Yes” to Jesus, Now What?

February 04, 2007

Rev. Nathaniel R. Elliot, Jr

Two fishing boats had been out all night on the lake of Gennesaret. Simon a fisherman, and his partners were just plain worn out. Despite their skills, experience and efforts, they had no success. The boats came home empty. In the morning the fishermen were on the shore washing their nets in preparation for the next night’s fishing. Presently, they would be going home to catch some sleep in the heat of the day. Jesus of Nazareth was teaching the people along the shore and was being pushed out into the water by the crowd. He asked Simon to move his boat a little way out, if he would, so that he might address his audience from a kind of informal pulpit. The next thing Simon knew, Jesus was in his boat giving far more than just a three point, fifteen minute homily. When it was finally over, Jesus the carpenter had the temerity to tell Simon, a first rate fisherman for most of his life, to put out into the deep to catch the fish that Simon already knew weren’t there. Jesus had stepped over the pastoral threshold: as the hill country churchgoer said after a particularly pointed sermon, *he’s gone from preachin’ to meddlin.*

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Who knows what makes Simon want to head back out.

Exhaustion? Exasperation? Resignation? The Holy Spirit? No doubt some of each and the lines between them are notoriously fuzzy. However, the decision was made, there is in such followership the unmistakable surrender of his will to the will of Jesus. There is an implied admission that he doesn't know what is best.....even about fishing.....and that perhaps Jesus does know. Simon lets go and before he can snap back into reality, he experiences in this little decision to follow, the mystery of the Gospel. Self-surrender and Gospel power meet right in the middle of the lake and Simon's life is forever changed. Having said “Yes” to Jesus and experiencing the amazing and overwhelming catch of fish, Simon found that his life, in self-surrender, had a goal, and that goal would be to catch people. Luke writes: *and when they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.*

When we consider the preparation and qualifications of Peter and the others for what Jesus asked of them, it's quite apparent that they had none. We may feel unworthy and try to get out of

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it, too, but God has been making use of unqualified servants in many, many ways ever since the human race was brought into existence. Just as it was true of the fishermen, so it is true with us. What we feel able to achieve will be far less important in the Lord’s sight than our willingness to be steadfastly used by God to draw others to his love. The revelations that come to us will take place within the framework of our daily lives. It is precisely as we fulfill our legitimate obligations in this world, as we show ourselves faithful in what we are called to do.....to be fishers.....that the control-consciousness which prevails in our culture will fall away from us like leaves from a tree.

But we are also meant to be a fellowship of believers who demonstrate Christ’s love in all that we do. Those whom we catch and those whom we don’t will surely know we are Christians by our love: our love for each other; our love for our children, our parents, our families at large; our love for those whom we don’t know; our love for those we don’t necessarily like. Our love can be hope fulfilled for *someone*. It is an

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authentic healing love from us, as disciples of Jesus, that does by far the most in drawing people to the living Lord.

There is a little vignette from an unknown source about a missionary shipwrecked at sea, who washed up at the edge of a remote native village. Half dead from exposure to the elements and the wreck of the vessel, he was taken in and nursed back to health by the villagers. Subsequently he lived with them for the next 20 years. During that time, he confessed no faith; he sang no hymns; he preached no sermons. He neither read from, or taught any Scripture. But when the villagers became ill, he attended to them. When the people were hungry, he gave them from his own supply of food. When they were lonely, he was available to talk. He tutored the uneducated, patiently. He always took the side of the oppressed. There was no human condition among the villagers with which he could not and did not identify.

After 20 years had passed, other missionaries came from the sea and began talking to the people about a man named Jesus. After

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hearing the stories about Jesus, the natives insisted that he had lived among them for the past 20 years. One of them said to the missionaries, “Come, we will introduce you to the man about whom you have been speaking.”

I have on my desk at home what is called a “Celtic Rune of Hospitality, done in Old English calligraphy and what it says is this: *I saw a stranger yestreen, I put food in the eating place, drink in the drinking place, music in the music place, and, in the sacred name of the Triune. He blessed myself and my house, my cattle and my dear ones, and the lark said in her song ‘often, often, often, goes the Christ in the stranger’s guise*

AMEN.