

## Bouncing Balls and Fishing Holes

There are two themes I want to invite you to consider as we process this morning's lection:

- 1) The ministry of Jesus is characterized by a fluid, empowering sense of energy.
- 2) When Jesus offered the disciples to the opportunity to fish for people, he meant it.

Let's start with this idea of fluid energy. For Halloween, Mary Allen's teacher gave her a few of those tiny rubber bouncy balls, well actually tiny rubber bouncy eye balls. She and Lucy rediscovered them the other day, and they had the best time bouncing them on our living room floor. The little round ball hits the wooden floor, absorbs the energy of the impact, and darts around the room from one surface to another. My girls giggle, and the energy is infectious, sometimes so infectious that they bounce off the walls with silliness, too!

When Mark describes the healing, teaching, praying, congregating, and loving that Jesus does, I can't help but picturing this little bouncing ball zig-zagging around the Galilee. What's most striking to me, is that when Jesus offers a little piece of himself – his energy – the recipient doesn't catch, or dampen that energy as if they had a catcher's mitt, nor do they store it away for safekeeping in their pockets. In almost every instance, the one who is welcomed, healed, loved, invited, or affirmed, responds with energy. In today's story, Peter's mother-in-law is the recipient of Jesus' care. I'm gonna call her Gladys, because I know she had a name, and I think you might be able to see her more clearly if you name her.

So...Gladys has a fever; she's a stone's throw from the synagogue; and Jesus is happy to help. Don't pay so much attention to the healing process; consider her response instead. Freed from this fever, filled once more with energy, Gladys "serves them."

Now, stay in the 1950s if you want, and believe the text to say Gladys made them cucumber sandwiches and Arnold Palmers. It was her house, so yes, I am sure she

arranged the hospitality expected of a suitable host. But I think it's a whole lot more than that. Something in this encounter transformed Gladys, made her more aware of God's presence, left her with a resolve to help others experience the same sense of belonging, wholeness, and peace she found in her encounter with Jesus. So when Gladys serves, I read that to mean that she dedicated herself to expanding the beloved community in whatever capacity was needed.

And you might ask how I infer such a thing. I infer it, because I have seen with my own eyes, people like Gladys, who in response to healing, have offered service, yes sometimes by washing a dish, or making a sandwich, but also by being advocates for justice, and seizing every window, big or small, to reveal the divine among us. Jesus inspires a fluid, reciprocal energy in each one of us – Jesus serves, and we serve, and others do, too.

Today, Mark shows us how that bouncing ball got started.

Okay, fishing. When Jesus said, "I will make you fish for people," he wasn't lying! In the second part of the text, buoyed by the service and logistical prowess of Gladys, the disciples go throughout the village of Capernaum to find all those folks in need of wholeness.

Think about the image of a net being cast, or a fly-rod flicking along the water line of the river. The fisherperson casts a wide circle, seeking to draw fish, or people, toward them. Jesus, representative of God's love, pursues humanity. Now please don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying Jesus is employing a hook 'em and cook 'em approach. I want you to think more about the gathering aspect – Jesus seeks to draw people near to him, in order to offer a healing energy. This stands in stark contrast to the scribes we met last week, who stand in the city square, and expect the people to come to them; condemn the people when they can't; and frankly, aren't really bothered by the absence of those left out, because they don't consider such absence a great loss to the community.

Jesus is also not interested in fishing a small area. Just as the healing of Gladys is only the first part of her story, this first catch is only the first part of Jesus' journey. Gladys doesn't say "I'm healed, now I don't have to worry about who's not." Gladys wants to be part of healing others. Likewise, Jesus isn't content to

make God's presence known in one neighborhood; he's determined to make God's presence known in every neighborhood.

Jesus doesn't head to the Rotary Club Fish Fry to accept Capernaum's Citizen of the Year Award. He retreats, in silence, and contemplation, and prayer, in order that he might store up more of that re-generating energy to share with others. Jesus and the disciples haven't gone fishin' for the day; they're going fishing every day.

This morning, I'm grateful for Gladys, because I needed to hear from her today. In this crazy pandemic life, I think we can have a tendency to believe that our healing, or our wholeness, all boils down to a vaccine, or the continuation of gainful employment, or worship in person, or even the procurement of paper towels or other scarce items. And all of this isolation is forcing us into isolationist reactions. But Gladys reminds us that when we find grace in difficult seasons; such grace is not a ticket to disengage from a wounded world, but is instead an invitation to be an extension of that very same grace to, for, and alongside our neighbors.

This morning, I'm also grateful that Jesus wasn't a professional bass fisher. Jesus wasn't after quotas, or trophies, or monetary prizes. Jesus knew that you can never get too full, never have enough, never stop deriving pleasure in the fishing for people – the expansion of beloved community. Jesus was willing to get up at dawn. Jesus was willing to find new places to fish. Jesus dreamed about a kingdom that was....THIS BIG.

Good friends, in the days ahead, may our healing reincarnate itself as service; may we adventure new seas in the pursuit of neighbors beyond our walls; may we live with the timely recognition AND joy of God's presence among us; May we follow Jesus to the next village.

May it be so, and may it be soon! Amen.