

Gone fishin' / By a shady, wady pool . . .

The Gospel of Luke begins with a fishing story. The Gospel of John ends with a fishing story. Whether there was something intentional in that, it's hard to say. Probably not, since the two Gospels originated independently of each other. Just read them and you'll see why. But may we not be guided by the Spirit to make something out of the two – as fishing stories? Sure we can, because the Spirit did not stop operating two thousand years ago – but is influential in our lives and imaginations even today.

Luke's account tells of Jesus, at the commencement of his career, embarking in a boat owned by Simon Peter and his partners. From one of the boats Jesus launches into a presentation of good news about God and grace to an audience on shore. Then he urges Simon to move out and lower his nets for a catch – something Simon despaired of, having fished all night and caught nothing. Nevertheless he moves out, lowers his nets and is almost pulled overboard by the load of fish that threatens to tear the nets. Others join in hauling the load in.

John's account relates to the close of his Gospel – after the resurrection event – where Simon Peter and a couple of other disciples continue their habit of fishing and catch nothing – despite a night long effort. By dawn they are too weary to recognize Jesus himself standing on the shore – telling them to recast their net over the right side of their boat. Skeptically the disciples do so and are astounded at the number of fish they draw up. At the same time they recognize who that stranger is. They drag the net ashore and find the stranger – who is the risen Jesus – has prepared a fire for a well-earned breakfast, after which Jesus focuses his eyes on Simon Peter (still remorseful over denying he knew Jesus) and asks him: Do you love me? What can Peter say?

Two fishing stories! Often they are interpreted as a reference to the future missionary effort of the disciples of Jesus to go out and haul in the world, become “fishers of men”, catch people of every nation, gather them around the same Eucharist the disciples shared on that long ago shore.

But we can't rule out that this casting a net into a seemingly empty sea also has to do with plumbing the depths of your heart and that of the others all around you, alerting you to the hidden presence of a “you” that you hardly know, so full of grace, of care, of a link to the very Source of your being that awaits to break the surface of your often necessarily superficial way of living from day to day.

Lower your nets. Think deep thoughts. Wonder about what has been going on over the course of your life, about the opinions you hold, do they correspond only to the daily news or have you picked up a psalm that begins: Out of the depths I have cried to thee, O Lord! Have you been fishing all day, every day – with insufficient attention to who and what and why you really are? The world's media would have you always never let up on mending your nets instead of using them.

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