

**Net-fishing Jesus Style**  
By the Rev. Salying Wong

Prayer from Psalm: The Lord is my light and my salvation, of what shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom then shall I be afraid?

I will always remember the look on the faces of Russian protesters of the war in Ukraine I saw on the news. I saw average people caught by a fierce outrage at what Putin was doing. Some were older, some were younger. Some came with their pets. They had no weapons. There wasn't any violence in their bodies as they sat down or walked or stood. I watched their faces as they were dragged off by the police. Where are they now, I wonder? Are they imprisoned? Have they been murdered or tortured?

From the vantage point of a journalist, how would you describe these acts of resistance? Are they pointless or even foolish against a machine such as Putin's military? Could you see yourself making such a sacrifice—and to what avail? Fierce outrage took average people to a level of unexpected engagement and sacrifice. That is what happened at this protest in Russia. That is also what happened when Jesus called the disciples.

It is important to see that when Jesus called his disciples, it was after John the Baptizer was arrested. John had been protesting what Herod Antipas was doing. Herod Antipas had enough of this brazen wildman and his preaching. He put John in prison. He would behead John.

It is at this point that Jesus, who had received John's baptism, took John's message from the wilderness and went on the road. He leaves the wilderness, leaves Nazareth, leave Galilee—and moves to the big city across the sea. He settled there and began to recruit for the movement. I imagine going around Capernaum and talking with the people. Maybe he visited the baker and said, "You hear about John—how Herod arrested him? You want to get involved? The kingdom of heaven is like leaven kneed into the dough. Leaven is small, but when you kneed it into the dough, it grows and grows. Join me in leavening the Kingdom of God." But the baker might have said, "It isn't right what Herod's doing, but I don't get involved. You stick your head out and someone might cut it off." Jesus made his way to the candlestick maker. "You know, you shouldn't keep a light under the bushel. When you light a lamp, you put it high to cast light for all to see." But the candlesticker might have said, "Hey man, I'm just here to make candles." So Jesus moved on and saw Simon and Andrew casting their net into the sea.

"Hi Simon and Andrew. Did you hear about what's going on? Herod Antipas arrested John the Baptizer. Aren't you sick of this? Are you sick of tyranny? Our kings collude with Rome and kill our prophets."

I imagine Simon and Andrew saying, “Yeah, we’ve had enough of tyranny. How long will Israel be under this yoke? We want freedom!”

Jesus said, “I’ve been watching you cast your net today. If you follow me, I will show you how to fish for people. I will show you how to gather the people together in the net of God’s Kingdom, where God reigns and not Rome.”

Simon and Andrew were the first to be taken with the idea of fishing for people with Jesus. Jesus saw two others, James and John, with their father Zebedee. They were retying their net where it had broken. Jesus might have said to them, “The net of Rome we’re caught in is broken. Follow me and you will find a net that never breaks. It expands to hold fish of every kind.” John and James looked at their father Zebedee. These ties of family were strong. They looked at the Sea of Galilee. Eeking a life from fishing, after Rome collected their tax, was all they knew. But this provincial life with tribal and family ties—it was too small.

Jesus told them a parable. The Kingdom of God is like a net, that when thrown into the sea, catches fish of every kind (Mt. 13:47). Simon and Andrew, James and John looked at their own nets and wondered about the net of God, that great web. How many could it hold, this net of God? More than the sea? More than Israel? At the point of when Jesus called these disciples, they did not really imagine that it could be bigger than Israel. Their messiah would be a political leader who would mount a rebellion against their oppressor. Their messiah would be powerful. It would only be following Jesus along the way to Jerusalem that they would really begin to understand how deep and wide the mercy net was. This net would catch fish of every kind. It was for all the world.

At the beginning of discipleship, each disciple had a vision of how it all ought to turn out. And it was only in walking with Jesus to Jerusalem that they realized that casting the net of the Kingdom of God would claim Jesus’ life and some of their own. If they had known this in the beginning, they would have just kept fishing for fish rather than people. But, as they saw how the God’s net really worked, how instead of squeezing them and suffocating them, it was spacious and merciful—they kept walking with Jesus. They saw that in God’s net, they did not only belong to each other, but they knew their belonging in God. When the cost of discipleship became clear, they were no longer afraid. They gave up their own vision of salvation for the vision of God’s wide and spacious mercy net. So, as Peter was crucified upside down and Andrew crucified on an X shaped cross, and the others were whipped, mocked, and stoned, they knew what it meant to be in the embrace of the net of the Kingdom. They could pray with the psalmist, The Lord is my light and my salvation, of what shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom then shall I be afraid?