

**Caught up in Kingdom Nets, We Drop Nets that Entangle
based on Mark 1:14-20, David Jahnke, 1/18/15**

The great scholar NT Wright reminded me that the gospel of Mark should be read as apocalyptic literature. An apocalypse is an unveiling-- a mysterious revelation. The first thing to note is that Mark's apocalypse is not primarily about the future. It is about the past and the present. [from The New Testament and the People of God]

The followers of Jesus experienced a particular history with him. And they understood pretty quickly that God was doing something incredible and crucial before their eyes. Things that they could hardly believe were happening around and for them; for Israel; for the world. They came to understand that the Kingdom of Heaven had come to earth.

So the apocalypse—the revelation of Jesus as put into writing by Mark was this Kingdom of Heaven. And that Kingdom is as near us as it was to Jesus' disciples. The Kingdom is NOT foreign to this world; and it is NOT an abstract concept; it is life, health, peace, joy, justice and mercy incarnate...in our flesh and in this world. It is the innate sense of right and wrong up here; it is the pull to love and care for others down here; it is our attraction to nature and to beauty out there. It is the aching to be made complete and whole in our gut; to be at peace personally, inter-personally and socially.

That is what the disciples experienced with Jesus and what the early church experienced in the eruption of His Spirit upon the world. That is why they gave up their lives for him, along with the resurrection.

Point Number two about an apocalypse-- when we think of the apocalypse, we generally think of very bad news—the end of the world, judgment, pain and suffering, condemnation. But Jesus unveils something entirely different and says it is all good news; and not just good news for the righteous and the faithful who have longed for this day; fed up with oppression and injustice. It is good news for the less than righteous and faithful-- as well. They too got caught up in waves of love and grace and truth that brought to life tremendous beauty and goodness within and around them.

God's Kingdom transforms. And while changes are hard, every Kingdom change is life-giving. What Jesus unveiled in his first coming must be our

foundation for understanding what his second coming will look like at the end of time; it frames and fills our Kingdom living in the present.

Point 3-- Apocalyptic literature is filled with mystery. I just read Mark chapter 4 yesterday. Jesus said,

26 "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. **27** Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how."

We see this mystery in today's passage. Jesus walks along the Lake and sees four young men. Nothing happens other than a few words scattered to the wind. But the words mysteriously carry Life. And they are breathed in and penetrate to the depths of the young men. And with no rational explanation, they drop their nets and join Jesus, not knowing where he will lead.

These four had been fishing their whole lives. They had watched their fathers fish; many of their uncles and their grandpas probably as well. Family and fishing around this Galilean Lake was their life.

In the modern world, our vocation changes a few times over a lifetime. Most of us move many times. We are called to say goodbye to family members or perhaps sever ties with them for a while. And we know how stressful all of these transitions are. But imagine what it was like back then when people stayed in the same place with their family, doing what their family had done for generations!

I think that nothing can explain their leaving other than the sheer presence of Jesus filling them with faith. Something about him was completely trustworthy and compelling. It's like a net cast down from the Kingdom of heaven which caught Peter and Andrew and James and John up in a whirlwind of wondrous possibility. They were told that they would now fish for people.

Point 4-- Dreams and visions are often a part of apocalyptic literature. I have had a recurring dream for years. I am fishing with a simple wooden pole on a Minnesota lake lined with pines. The water is very still with sunlight reflecting off of it. All I see is the red and yellow bobber, the water, the trees, the bright sun. There is perfect peace and anticipation as I wait...and wait ...and then bloop...half the bobber drops below the surface and pops back up again...anticipation turns into adrenaline. Then...bloop...the red and yellow disappear completely under the surface. And my joy is complete as I feel the tug on the stick. Interestingly, I do not think I ever pull in the fish into the boat. Maybe that is not my job...

I think this dream is about the adventure, the excitement, the joy of being caught up in the Kingdom of God. It is about discovering something big and mysterious in the depths of reality. It's about my intuition, even before I believed, that there was something below the surface of what my senses could take in; something related to water (font), the wood (cross), the light of the sun. And finally there is the fulfillment of the catch though it is the fisherman—the one who seeks-- who is caught by what underlies everything.

God is persistently casting heavenly nets our direction; and it can feel disorienting because it calls us to change. But it is actually re-orienting us and anchoring us to a deeper and truer reality. We meet Jesus and as we follow him and put his teachings into practice, our lives are founded upon a rock that goes back to the beginning of time.

And that rock of ages is the guide and guidebook of all creation— that gives us the confidence and faith to put up our sails and be led by the wind, the Spirit...into the wonders of God's Kingdom. And if you believe in eternal life, and if you believe in love and mercy and truth, then you have been caught by the Spirit of God. Then it is just a matter of learning how to more deeply commit

And how we can help lead others there because with God, it is never just about the individual. N.T. Wright relays the following story.

Today I happened to take a walk in the evening sunlight by a Scottish Harbour. And to my surprise, I came upon a man...who was mending a lobster pot. I asked myself how he would have responded if I had told him to give it all up and follow me— or even to give it all up and follow Jesus. The town was appropriately enough, St. Andrews. [from Mark for Everyone, p. 8]

He did not ask him, though perhaps he should have. The point is that I doubt any of us are going to give up our vocations after hearing this sermon.

But there are other nets to drop that lead us into the Kingdom-- the entanglements of sin, shame, guilt, fear, anxiety; the web of others' judgments and criticisms; the burdens of overwork and striving to secure ourselves. Following Jesus frees us from all these nets.

Every time we gather around this little lake we learn to put the Kingdom of Jesus Christ and everything it represents first in our lives. The more we do so, the more joy, peace, love, and hope we experience. And the more that we experience these blessings, the more we exude them and attract people to the Kingdom we are citizens of. We become better and better fishers of people.

It is not so much having the perfect words or eloquence with language that draws people in. Even those of us who hear the Word on a weekly basis and study regularly are not necessarily the best proclaimers of the faith. Even those of us called to speak! We all need to get comfortable with the language of faith.

But remember how few words Jesus used in today's passage. This is emblematic of Mark's revelation. Jesus speaks pithy little sayings and mysterious parables not easily understood by the crowds. And after people follow him, he explains their meaning.

It was the many ways that the Kingdom emanated from Jesus— his expression, and manner, and touch and hospitality— as much as his Words, that attracted people to him. And His Spirit will do the same for and through us as we simply commit to following in his gentle, loving, caring footsteps. And once people are drawn in, then we do our best to teach the mysteries of God.

May we do so through the creative power of the Father, the trustworthy power of the Son, and the love of God's ever-present Spirit. And God's people say...