

Isaiah 9:1-4  
1 Corinthians 1:10-18  
Matthew 4:12-23  
Psalm 27:1, 5-13

I remember a Vacation Bible School moment when I was probably ten years old. It was about Jesus saying to Peter, “You are a fisherman; follow me and you’ll fish for humans.” Jesus saw Peter casting a net and called him. At VBS, someone bought a heavy net from Army supply store and, since I was the biggest kid, they had me cast it onto some of the other kids to show what fishing for humans would look like. Today’s Gospel lesson is the very same lesson from when I was kid. But today, I read something that was not highlighted to me at VBS. Jesus called two different groups of fisherman – those casting their nets and those mending their nets.

The Church gets really excited about the ones who cast the net, proverbially speaking. We get excited about the Billy Grahams, the TV preachers, the ones who cast a wide net and bring people into the faith. But what about God? What does Jesus see? He saw Peter casting a net and called him. But, the next sentence shows, he sees two brothers (their dad was named Zebedee) mending nets. Jesus calls them. They left Zebedee in the boat and followed.

What I hear in this passage is that Jesus is looking for people who know how to mend the nets. Net mending is vitally important in fishing. Nets get caught on things and rip. To be effective, one has to have the practice of mending, every day, before fishing. Norman Rockwell painted three different fisherman – none of them were mending. That’s not what society focuses on. We like the casting. I think that God sees the mending. I think God identifies with the menders of nets.

The Greek word for “mending” is *καταρτίζω* (transliterated as *katartizo*). It means to mend, repair, restore, equip, or put in order. I bring this up because Matthew’s Gospel (and the rest of the New Testament) was written in Greek. I did a search on that word to see if it was used anywhere else in the New Testament. Incidentally, Biblical scholars do this to see in what ways that word is used by different authors in perhaps different contexts to see how best to translate it into English. Here is what I found:

The first letter of Peter, chapter five, nearly one of the last sentences of the tome, Peter wrote, “After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself *katartizo* you, support you, strengthen and establish you.” (1 Pet. 5:10)

The first letter to the church in Thessalonica, written by Paul, says this, “Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and *katartizo* whatever is lacking in your faith.” (1 Thes. 3:10)

The Letter to the Hebrews, unknown author, “By faith we understand that the worlds were *katartizo* by the Word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are unseen.” (Heb. 11:3)

And then, of course, our passage from Matthew. Lastly, a near-mirror image was written by the Gospel writer Mark.

Nets can be mended (*katartizo*). Looking at Peter’s letter (which, I have to say, I very much appreciate because he’s a fisherman and knows very well what it is to *katartizo* a net), he writes that after suffering, God himself will “mend” you. God will first mend, then support, then strengthen and then establish. But, number one is God will *mend* you.

Moving on to the Letter to the Hebrews, the mending from God is from an invisible (not seen) force that makes things visible. Nets are visible and the hands that mend are visible. However, back to Peter’s point, God’s invisible hands mend so that the mending becomes visible. Lastly, from Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians, we can mend one another.

I take from this run through the Greek New Testament that “mending” is an important word, it is a work that God does, and God did it first, God does it to mend us after suffering, God “mended” the world together – from the invisible to the visible with the medium used as “mending” – and, we can mend one another.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to people who are not fisherman, I can tell you that when you mend, God sees you. God identifies with your action. God sees your mending – whether your are putting yourself back together, helping a loved one mend, or if you (like what Paul wrote) are mending a church or other organization together – God identifies with what you are doing. Jesus found mending so important that he called people who were doing just that. Matthew found it important and highlighted it in his Gospel (and Mark did as well).

A friend of ours invited us to participate in his non-profit to help Russian orphans. It was what placed us on our path to adopt our two daughters. Our friend is also a thoracic surgeon. He literally mends people – on the inside. My friend, and parishioner, Don Judd, talked to me about practicing stitching in medical school. He two was a mender. But, just like how Scripture adds dimension to mending, there are many ways to “mend nets” today.

There are many things that go through a priest’s head before service begins. For me, wondering about how the altar is set up is not one of them. We have a wonderful, and consistent, Altar Guild who puts it all together. And, I don’t worry about it at all. In my previous parish, one of the children who started serving on the altar noticed that every Sunday the altar is set (and that I’m not the one who does it). He said it’s like invisible hands come in and set everything correctly. I smiled and said, “Yeah, it’s like that. Let me introduce you to some of those very visible, but invisible, hands,” and I introduced him to the Altar Guild. To serve on the Altar Guild is to be a 21<sup>st</sup> century net-mender. You do work, that mends people with themselves, each other, and God, and it’s basically done invisibly.

Net-mending is the ultimate behind-the-scenes work. It is the work of people who go nearly unnoticed and therefore unappreciated. But, God identifies with your work. God sees it! And, I think that God invites you to do it.

The music program at All Angels is quite visible and important. However, most of the work to make it happen goes on behind-the-scenes. All the preparation, practice, dreaming of what we should sing and do; all of that, happens like fishermen mending nets. It also makes us strong as a worship community and binds our hearts together and with God.

The net-menders among us are, in large part, the Vestry, church leadership and servers, our finance committee, and the flower guild. They too are net-menders. God sees their work. God identifies with their work.

There is another sort of mending that happens at church. Paul wrote (and we read it today) to the church in Corinth “to be united in the same mind and the same purpose.” Some, throughout Church history, have thought that passage means we all have to agree and think the same thing; and, if someone thinks something different, we need to kick them out. No, that’s not what Paul was saying. Untied in the same mind is using the mending verb again. We are to be stitched together, in one mind, with one another for the same purpose of bringing the Good News to others – to forgive, to restore, to bring peace and salvation. We don’t have to think the same way, we don’t have to vote the same way, we don’t have to all agree on the best way to raise children; no, we are to be mended together to serve God with one another.

Net-mending happens with the believer who, after the day is over, goes to bed and prays to the invisible God. The mending together of one’s joys and let-downs in prayer to God. Even with doubt, skepticism, but holding onto the daily practice of mending prayers with God; that action is seen and heard by God. And, Jesus identifies and calls the one who mends, daily, their prayers to life and to God. So, while the world, and many parts of the Church, likes to focus and celebrate those who cast the net, God sees the net menders; God identifies with the work of net-mending, and Jesus calls the net menders to himself.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.