

“Power Belongs to God”

New London UMC

Sun., Jan. 24, 2021

Mark 1:14-20 *The Message*; **Psalm 62:5-12** *NRSV*

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I think everyone has seen the figure of “**Lady Justice**” – there is often a sculpture of her at courthouses or in courtrooms. She is typically depicted wearing a **blindfold**. This is usually interpreted to mean that justice is “blind” – or impartial and objective – and should apply equally to all who seek it without fear or favor, regardless of one’s wealth, power, or standing. In one hand “Lady Justice” holds a **scale** – as evidence must be weighed on its own merit; while the needs of the individual are balanced against the needs of society; and there should also be a fair balance between the interests of one individual and those of another. In the other hand she holds a **sword** which represents power and punishment, because justice can be swift and final. The sword is usually held lower or below the scale to show that the hearing and balancing of evidence comes before the determination of punishment. She stands with one foot on a **book**, which shows that she stands on the law; and the **snake** under her other foot represents her putting a stop to evil and lies. This strong image of “Lady Justice” has evolved from ancient Roman and Greek personifications or deifications of Justice. In our country, and in our time, “Lady Justice” has been used to symbolize not just the ideals of our justice system, but also to highlight the ‘blindspots’ where justice seems to be lacking.

I have been thinking about this dual use of the “Lady Justice” symbolism. So far this month we’ve had ample opportunities to consider what it means to uphold the law – and in particular our country’s constitution; and what can happen when a power play is made to overthrow the law that “Lady Justice” stands on. What we’ve experienced this January has been both eye-opening and troubling, to say the least. This has brought an uneasiness about the future, and we’re not sure what to expect next.

The question of “what’s next?” also hangs in the air as our reading from the Gospel of Mark starts with the words: “After John was arrested.” The same John who came out of the wilderness to call all of Israel to repent and prepare the way for the One who is to come, who would be more powerful than John. John who baptized hundreds of people in the Jordan River. John who told his disciples that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God. John has been arrested. Why is this happening now? What does it mean for John’s followers, and for everyone who has been baptized by John? What’s going on? In this uneasy atmosphere Jesus goes into the Galilee region preaching: “Time’s up! God’s kingdom is here. Change your life and believe God’s Message.” It’s like Jesus picked up where John left off. Didn’t Jesus understand that this kind of message led to John being arrested?! It makes me wonder why Simon and Andrew, James and John, would go with Jesus to have their fishing skills re-tooled to catch men and women instead of fish. Wouldn’t bringing people together to follow Jesus be dangerous since Jesus is operating outside of the sanctioned political and religious power bases and systems? . . . Wouldn’t **you** want to know more about where Jesus is going with this fishing for people business

before setting aside your nets and getting out of the boat to follow Jesus? I know I'd have questions. But I wonder what I would do.

Perhaps we should stop for a moment and consider what it means that the Son of God chose to approach fishermen to tell them, "Come with me." Jesus didn't invite the heavy hitters, the well-connected, and wealthy to come with him. No. Jesus invited people who knew how to work day in and day out for a living. Jesus invited people who knew that they had to stay on top of mending their nets every day – because if they didn't make those daily repairs it wouldn't be long before they wouldn't have any nets to catch anything in. Jesus invited people who had learned how to spend hours on end looking for, and finding, fish. These were people who trusted that the fish were out there to be found. Jesus chose to invite people who weren't the most glamorous or sweet smelling folks around, but they were people who most likely had the patience, tenacity, and endurance to keep up with Jesus day in and day out, and who could put their trust in Jesus and keep it there.

Exactly who were these men and women that Jesus was asking Simon and Andrew, and James and John to learn to "fish for"? What kind of "fish" were these followers of Jesus most likely to catch? It seems to me that the largest number of available "fish" would be the bulk of the population: people who were doing the best they could to make a living day in and day out. "Fish" that would probably be a lot like the fishermen. . . . But it's also true that Jesus' fishermen knew that when you cast out a net – any kind of fish can be caught in it. The net is impartial. Results can vary. Fishing is not about casting the net once and expecting to pull it in full of just the fish you want, or that you expect to see. Fishing is about continuing to cast the net – even after you pull in nothing you expected, or simply nothing at all! Every cast has potential – and you never know what you'll get with the next cast. Perhaps Simon and Andrew, James and John were more prepared to follow Jesus and to fish for people than we first might have thought.

When I read verse 5 of Psalm 62: "For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him," I wonder how long Simon and Andrew, James and John had been waiting – and maybe not even realizing that their souls had been waiting – for God to speak to them through Jesus? Because it feels like something "clicked" in them when they saw and heard Jesus. I think they recognized the power of God, the power of God's steadfast love, in Jesus. And they trusted in that power. I think that's why they went with Jesus.

We also need to trust in God, trust in Jesus, trust in the Holy Spirit, and trust in each other. We need to keep casting our net as we remember that the real power in this fishing process belongs to God. The power is found in God's steadfast love for us. A love that does not end, that does not vary according to our economic status or social standing, or that of anyone else. If we're willing to connect to that powerful love, and if we're willing to love both God and God's "fish" – there's no telling what could happen next. Amen.