

Fishing

One of the infrequent pastimes that I enjoy is fishing—especially fly fishing. I am not really sure why except for the fact that I like the stillness of the sport, being on the water and the necessary challenge of trying to catch fish. Suffice it to say, that the sport offers me time to reflect and get away from it all, something that is important for my own personal spiritual journey

There are times however, when in the midst of defeat, much like those familiar moments in scripture, when on the Sea of Galilee no fish were caught (John 21:5) that one returns home wet, tired and dejected. It is precisely in these moments that one discovers what it means to be a fisherman, for one cannot really know until the fish have stopped biting. Only when one is completely beaten by the water, skunked by the fish and abused by the weather can one proclaim to be truly a fisherman as opposed to somebody who simply likes to catch fish.

In some ways, a parallel can be found in ministry, especially as it relates to the clerical system. The ministry is more than the receiving of a “call” and more than all the training and equipping to be a leader. In fact, it is only when there is no response to the effort put forth, when defeat has set in, that one discovers what it truly means to be a minister. Sometimes there is a struggle, for when the spirit of the church is a faint whisper, when prayers seemingly go unanswered, when congregations stagnate and people are no longer excited about future possibilities, there is a tendency for failure motif to set in. Guilt can come to the forefront and disempower the minister as if all were his or her fault. But the real pastor, priest, minister (fisherman) continues to fish, for God may want them to remain faithful.

Being faithful has its rewards, for many times, just when one is ready to throw in the towel, one is caught. It is the statement of true ministry. More than once, God has stepped in at the last moment and resurrected a situation demonstrating that the spirit is alive and well.

As those involved in ministry, clerical or lay, wrestling with some “Leviathan of life” is often the norm. We need to recognize that God is not only in the catching but also in the fishing. In fact, the simplest message in fishing and ministry is the hardest to accept: sometimes the fish are biting and sometimes they are not.