



“Living Cross-Eyed”

BY PASTOR JOHN HILLMER

(1st Corinthians 1:26 – 2:5; Matthew 4:12 – 23)

Paul Simon’s newest CD, released last year, has a song called “Street Angel”.

a few lines: *It’s God goes fishing.*

And we are the fishes.

He baits His lines

With prayers and wishes.

They sparkle in the shallows

They catch the falling light.

We’re hungry for His love,

And so we bite.

For me, it’s a re-wording of the Gospel text for the 21st century.

Re-cast in an “Urban setting” (Street Angels – living on the streets)

of this rural and sea-side setting. Simon and Andrew – casting their nets into the sea.

Jesus says: “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people”

It’s God who goes fishing.

And we are the fishes.

He baits His lines

With prayers and wishes.

They sparkle in the shallows



*They catch the falling light.
We're hungry for His love,
And so we bite.*

It's a picture of the church, and the mission of the church. TO FISH FOR PEOPLE, and to gather them in to the grace and love of God. (That's your JOB! ☺ "Go Fishing!")
It's fresh, different way to think about the mission of the church. (And it's Biblical as can BE.)

But notice – at least in the words of the song – what the bait is. "He baits his lines, with PRAYERS and WISHES." Not with the lure of wealth, or power, or status, or success, that can so easily catch our eye. Not some empty, tempting promise that catches our heart: "Become a Christian, and you'll rise to a level of prosperity that you've never SEEN before.

That's where the "cross" comes in.

The cross is God's answer, to 'false promises' and 'empty lures'.

It may not 'catch our eye' at first, because it's not glitzy - It's rough and rugged - But it is the power of God. The first 3 chapters of I Corinthians – Paul takes 3 chapters – and loads them with his whole approach. The Cross. From different angles and with different phrases – it's like a drum-beat. The Cross. "I have decided to know nothing among you except Christ – and Him Crucified. "Foolishness" to the world – but a demonstration of the Spirit, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom, but on the power of God. Because God chose what is "weak" to bring down the strong. (read 'domination' and 'control'.)

God used what is weak, and ugly, to upend the power-structures of the world.

Gospel today. Opening verse: "Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested,
he withdrew to Galilee."



John - arrested. Jesus - withdrew. (often taken in the sense of "retreat". Scampered off) No – this is 'relocation'. Intentionally, he decided - to relocate.) Strategic. Turning point. Something is beginning. "Jesus left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum, by the sea; in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken by the prophet might be fulfilled.

In the 1st century B.C. (yrs before Christ) - when the Romans entered the land, to take occupation, they came in via the Phoenician Coast, north of Tyre; ("road by the sea") and to make a show of their force, they lined the road by the sea, with thousands upon thousands of crucifixions; so that travelers would walk between these crosses, mile after mile, and see "crucified bodies" – and of course the message was clear: "Don't mess with the empire." -talk about 'walking through the valley of the shadow of death'.

And when John was arrested, Jesus began. He went to the land of deep darkness, and to that region where people sat in the shadow of death – and began his ministry. He called fishermen; not aristocratic folk; or beaurocrats. He said "Follow me. And I will make you fish for people'. And he began proclaiming "GOOD NEWS" not Fear. Not Threats. Not dominating intimidation of "Do this" or Die. GOOD NEWS! - for all people. He started in the synagogues, and went through the countryside; curing disease and sickness. (I tell you, living in a constant state of fear, and oppression, with death staring you in the face at every turn -- that would make anyone sick; turn your stomach, and twist your thinking) It is the CROSS, that he TAKES, and thrusts it into the very operational system, of the dominant empire. *(The very thing...)*

So Jesus calls and proclaims: "**repent**" – which means "TURN". Turn from THAT WAY - of looking at life which is filled with fear and intimidation. TURN – and live THIS WAY! For the Kingdom of heaven has come near.

(And "Life in the Kingdom", is far more blessed, and good, and rich, and abundant, than anything this side of heaven! It's God's one, great purpose for all.)

And Paul, catches this vision fully (at HIS turning point on the road to Damascus) -the apostle Paul - and Paul makes this the center-piece of his proclamation. The CROSS.

(Well – 2 things actually – the CROSS, and UNITY.)



Now I appeal to you, brother and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement! And that there be no division among you. But that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to proclaim...to proclaim the Gospel! And not with eloquent wisdom, (not with flowery speech) so that the Cross might not be emptied of its power. For the message about the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing; but to us who are being saved. it is the power of God.

It is God's power. Something that CONFOUNDS the nations, because they just don't "get it".

So when Jesus says, "Take up your cross and follow me"... so often I think we hear that, and associate "my particular burden" in life. You carry your cross - whether it's a illness; and a broken relationship; or a failed business venture; or some piece of your past, some suffering, burden that you bear: you identify your "cross", and then, like a good Scout, you bear it faithfully and follow.

No , take up the cross and follow me!! Because this is the way God's Kingdom comes! This is the way God's Vision of life is made known in the world – where people can see that NOTHING, not struggles, not failures, not life, not death. NOT EVEN THE CROSS – can undo, what God is doing. Nothing is stronger than God's love and grace! Forgiveness! Mercy and Blessing! That's what "life in God's Kingdom" looks like. Nothing stops it. Not even the cross.

So TAKE it! Take it up. Keep your eye on it. ...and you heart and mind and soul.

This week – live in the wisdom and the power of the Cross.

Amen.