

I once heard the definition of insanity as doing the same thing over and over again and achieving the same result. I thought about that quote after reading this morning's gospel lesson. Because here we have a story of what happens when followers of God look at a problem in a different way.

This text is from the last chapter of the gospel according to John. The Easter story has already happened. John has already recorded the events of Jesus coming into Jerusalem, being hoisted onto a cross, left to die a miserable death, his body being placed in a tomb, and women discovering the empty tomb.

Previous to our text, John has shared the story of Jesus appearance to the disciples except for poor Thomas. Thomas missed out and doubted until Jesus reappeared and allowed Thomas to touch him and express his own belief. Now we pick up the story of what John says happens next.

Read John 21:1-14

In the movie, *Dead Poet's Society*, Robin Williams plays the character of a teacher in a boy's boarding school. He is an English teacher who challenges his students to view literature from outside the normal ways that they had been taught to read literature.

One scene illustrates how he wants them to read. He is teaching in the class when he stands up on top of his desk. He tells the students that viewing the class from that angle gives him a very different perspective on the class. And so he then invites all of the students to walk to the front of the class and stand on top of the desk as well. They are to view the class from another perspective.

If I walk over here in the sanctuary, I see certain things. If I walk over here, I see something else, if I walk up here to the balcony, I see something entirely different. If I were to walk outside, we would see something entirely different. This building looks different based on where you view it from.

In this story that John tells, the disciples have a problem. They have fished all night long and they have caught no fish. As the day breaks the next morning a man appears on the shore but the disciples do not know that it is Jesus. "Have you caught any fish?" he asks them. "We have not," they answer him.

Jesus then tells them to throw their nets over to the other side of the boat. They throw their nets to the other side of the boat and a miracle happens. They catch fish. They catch lots of fish. So many fish in fact that their nets can't even hold all of their fish. They eventually come ashore where they find a campfire and Jesus inviting them to share in a breakfast meal of their fish and fresh bread.

Have you ever had a situation where you faced a problem and you worked hard to solve that problem but you could not figure out the solution? And then someone else comes along and pretty quickly they look at the same problem and quickly solve the problem? And you look at them and say, "I can't believe I did not see that?" In order to tackle the challenges and problems we face, sometimes it takes looking at a problem from a different perspective.

In the novel The Poisonwood Bible, the story is told by the wife and four daughters of Nathan Price, a fierce, evangelical Baptist who takes his family and mission to the Belgian Congo in 1959. They find out, however, that everything they take with them, from garden seeds to Scripture, is transformed in the African soil.

Nathan Price heads off to Africa believing that he knows how to evangelize the people of the continent. But he is finding himself unsuccessful when he encounters the man who preceded him. But what he finds in his predecessor is someone who looks at this ministry with a different set of eyes. Price believes that he has come to Africa to bring Christ to the people and to eliminate their pagan ways.

His predecessor, a man referred to as Brother Fowles in the book, says to Price however, “They are very religious people you know. Everything they do is with one eye to the spirit. When they plant their yams and manioc, they’re praying. When they harvest, they’re praying. Even when they conceive their children, I think they are praying.” He then adds, “Have you heard the songs they sing here in Kilanga? They are very worshipful. It’s a grand way to begin a church service, singing a Congolese hymn to the rainfall on the seed yams. It’s quite easy to move from there to the parable of the mustard seed.”

Brother Fowles points out that he has to do some interpreting for the Congolese people and even admits that there are some parts of the story he just had to leave out because a story written in desert Palestine makes little sense to folks living in the Congo.

Both Nathan Price and Brother Fowles faced the same challenge, the challenge of being Christian missionaries in the Congo. One saw the problem one way and worked tirelessly to solve the problem using one method. The other, however, looked at the same challenge and used a very different method to attack the challenge before him. One worked against the Congolese people and one worked with them.

Take your net and throw it over to the other side of the boat. Are you facing a challenge in your life right now? Are you finding that you are working hard to solve that challenge but you are finding yourself making the same mistakes over and over again? That has been the story that I have lived out at times in my life and ministry.

Or maybe in your relationships with people important to you you have repeated the same patterns over and over again. And you are frustrated because you feel like you and your partner are just repeating the same patterns over and over and over again.

Could it be that many of us are repeating those old worn out patterns because we are stuck in looking at our problems from the same old tired perspective? Maybe we need to switch roles and start to look at our challenges from a different perspective.

For instance, if you and your spouse or significant other are repeating the same destructive patterns, then maybe you need to try to put yourself in the shoes of the other. Maybe you need to hear what it is like to be the other in your relationship. And then maybe the two of you can look at your problems in a different manner than you have looked at them in the past.

When Jesus tells his disciples to throw their net over the other side of the boat, I think he is challenging us to look at our challenges from a different perspective. And even though the church hasn't always been a place which has been willing to take chances, it should be. When the church functions as we should, the church is the one place which allows us to do this. And I think Scriptures like this morning's lesson challenge us to look at issues from a different perspective. To not be so narrow in our views of the world and the challenges before us.

Think for a moment about a challenge in your life. How are you trying to solve it? Could it be that God is trying to get you to solve this challenge in a different way? Maybe you are being challenged to change an attitude, change a reference point, change one's perspective.

I think you and I do have a choice. We can stick to our old patterns.

We can continue to fish from the one side of the boat.

Or, we can follow what Christ may be leading us to do.

It may be time to cast to the other side of the boat and see what Christ has for us to catch. AMEN.

-Kingsolver, Barbara, The Poisonwood Bible, Harper Perennial, NY, 2002

-Text: John 21: 1-14

-Given: April 18, 2010 in Allison Creek Presbyterian Church (York, SC)

Unison Prayer of Confession

We sing loud songs to you, O God, trusting they will drown out our mean-spirited murmurs about those around us. We hope you will turn a blind eye to our behaviors, while we imprison our families and friends with impossible expectations. We pull a muscle stretching to pat our selves on the back, but our attitudes and actions towards the poor and outcast of the world reveal we are not worthy to be called your children.

You never give up on us, Healing God. You are quick to forgive us, and quicker to offer us ways to share your name with everyone we meet. As you continue to be loving and affirming towards us, let us go to share the good news of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Glory and might are yours, God of Holiness,
blessing and honor are the songs we sing
to Jesus Christ, the Lamb who died for us.
When we were wandering down
the crooked paths of seduction,
he showed us that street called Straight.
When we could not make our way
through the shadows of sin,
he took our hand to bring us to you.
When the world heaped
threats and murder on him,
he silently picked up his cross,
going to his death, breathing his last,
so that resurrection's Spirit might
fill us with new life in you.

When we are ready to return
to our old lives, trying to do
the good news our way,
you break the bread and cook the fish, hand it to us,
so that as we eat of your life,
we may hear your call
to feed those who hunger for
your justice, your peace, your hope.
When we are adrift, getting nowhere,
you bless the cup, offering it to us,
so that as we drink of your spirit,
we might hear afresh your voice,
asking if we love our sisters and brothers,
and sending us forth to serve them.

And when our life has come to an end,
when we gather at glory's seashore
feasting on the meal you have prepared,
we will not be silent, but praise you forever,
God in Community, Holy in One. Amen.