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Fad or the Real Deal?

Imagine you are on a boat. This is a boat you know very well, you have spent the majority of your life on this boat. This is where your friends and colleagues are, you make a living on this boat catching fish. What you and your crew catch feeds not only your families, but the whole village.

Over the years there have been long stretched smooth sailing mixed with intermittent rough patches, but overall this boat and its crew are consistent. It is a good boat, a solid and trustworthy vessel.

Only lately, you have noticed that something seems different. Life on the boat isn't as life giving as it once was. Life on the boat has started to feel arduous, kind of grey all over and to make matters worse the fish aren't biting.

You're starting to wonder if it might be time to change things up, a new boat, new crew members, a different fishing hole maybe? But those things feel like they just scratch the surface. There is something bigger going on you just can't quite put your finger on it. You suspect others are feeling it too, but no one is saying anything out loud which makes it even harder to figure out. It feels like maybe grief is in the air, grief that can't help but get into the lungs and weigh you down.

What should you do?

Most people, at least in our country in this day and age, search for something to fill the void; maybe a new diet, a haircut, oxygenated drinking water, a different wardrobe, a move, maybe even a different family. Not too far down the road we discover that feeding a real hunger with placebos doesn't really solve anything long term.

It is a lesson we seem to learn over and over again, yet we keep casting our nets out the same side of the boat, seeking the answer in new fangled techniques, fancier nets, or maybe there is something wrong with the way the others are doing it- so we start blaming them for what isn't right.

All we know is that something feels off and we don't have a clue how to fix it, so we keep throwing our nets out the same side of the boat.

What is that quote attributed to Albert Einstein- you know the one about insanity, when we keep doing the same thing over and over again, expecting different results.

What stories do we tell ourselves about the endless fads we swallow hook, line and sinker, along with the false promises of salvation?

Do we really have any idea how vulnerable, how susceptible we are when we follow the snake oil salesman over and over again to the next best answer?

Now imagine yourself on that same boat on a different day. Today someone fresh climbs aboard, this fella's a stranger to us and yet there is something familiar about him. He invites us to "put out into the deep water and let down our nets for a catch."(Luke 5:4)

Its late and we have tried so many ways to make life better that our faith is waning and we are pretty sure that the reason we aren't getting better results is because we are actually deeply flawed individuals who don't deserve more. But this new guy invites us to trust him to "put out into the deep water and let down our nets for a catch."(Luke 5:4)

I know and you know that is hard because our trust has been violated so many times, yet we agree because there is something familiar about this guy, something oddly reassuring and this invitation, it doesn't feel like those temporary solutions designed to make us feel better for a day or an hour. This guy feels like the real deal, it feels like this choice might lead to an actual breakthrough.

But here's the thing about real systemic change, both personal and collective- it's scary. It demands that we re-examine all those things we thought had meaning and we might have to let go of a lot of those previous conclusions, it's like suffering a lot of little deaths. But this guy, we'll call him Jesus- says, "Do not be afraid," dive deeper.

In the Gospel story, what happens next is that the disciples catch so many fish that the other fishermen have to come out and help, and the boats start to sink from the enormous catch! What we also know is that some, not all, of those fisher folks walk away from life as it has been and follow Jesus on the path to a new Way.

Where are you with that today- you wanna stick out the old way or try something different?

How do we know if that thing is authentic and not just a passing fancy?

We may know because it has stood the test of time, but that alone is not enough because plenty of unhealthy things have withstood the test of time- misogyny and racism for example, so we have to put out deeper.

It is in touch with the ancient rhythms of the nature, that is always a good question to test authenticity, but perhaps the telltale test is whether or not whatever it is draws us into to our deepest sense of self.

I do not mean our new improved self, I mean the self that came into this world whole and whose worth is not subject to a better workout routine, career advancement, or investment gains. I mean the self that is so deeply routed in God that nothing, not even death can separate us from it.

Oneness with God is our birthright and our best teacher.

Remember what I said in the beginning about the boat being the source not only for our own food, but the for the food we provide for others?

If we are unmoored by this preoccupation and that news story, this new internet fad and the latest thought guru- we may find ourselves quiet literally unable feed those around us. Our spouses suffer, our children and grandchildren, our friends, our communities suffer.

And Jesus is just there- inviting us to “put out into the deep water and let down our nets for a catch.”

I pray we have the courage to engage that invitation.

Amen