

MAKING THINKING VISIBLE

A Sermon for the Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, February 7, 2010

Text: Luke 5:1-11

“Once, while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God . . .”

One of the highlights of my week comes each Thursday afternoon, when I go down to School 48 and tutor two pupils in the art of reading. This is part of the ReadUP program run by the United Way. I figure, this is one of the things in life I treasure the most, so it’s important to have a way to pass on that thing I love to some others.

Anyway, one of the techniques they teach us tutors to use to get the kids to read more thoughtfully is called “Making Thinking Visible” or “MTV.”

When we sit down for a tutoring session, we ourselves read a paragraph out of the chosen book. We stop at the end of a sentence and say what that sentence makes us think about or wonder about. That way, we demonstrate that reading is not just a matter of saying out loud the words you see printed on the page. They have to do with life. Our life. Our world.

Let me demonstrate the “MTV” procedure, using the beginning of today’s Gospel reading from Luke.

Text: *Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God,*

MTV: This makes me think of the times I have stood beside lakes, here and there. It is always a calming thing. I suppose Jesus liked that, too. On the other hand, he was under pressure because lots of people were “pressing in on him to hear the word of God.” That reminds me of rallies I’ve been to or heard about, where there were celebrities—like the recent rallies in Indianapolis, or during political campaigns. It also makes me think of how anything that is really *attractive* by its nature draws crowds.

Text: *²he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets.*

MTV: Jesus was a problem solver, evidently. I like that. He looked around for materials with which he could deal with the problem. “Aha! Two idle boats! That will do nicely!”

Text: *He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat.*

MTV: Instead of letting them push him right into the lake, he found a way to preach to them without being jostled by them. He didn't tell them to back off, which he could have. He wouldn't have wanted to discourage them from hearing the Word of God. I wonder if they didn't all think it was rather amusing, too, the way Jesus *did* sit down—the traditional way for a teacher to be—but did it in kind of an offbeat way.

Text: When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch."

MTV: I think Jesus wanted to reward Simon, although he was going to make Simon work for it. I suppose Jesus didn't have any other way to compensate Simon? He was on shaky ground, telling Simon what to do one more time.

Text: Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets."

I wonder if there was a pause in the middle of that. Like, first Simon was saying "Why waste our time?" And then Jesus might have stared at him, and Simon thought better of it. "Okay, if you say so. Master."

Anyway, the story goes along and you know how it ends. Huge catch of fish. Boats unable to hold it all. Simon ashamed and frightened. And Jesus says, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will be catching people. And when they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him."

Now, it's easy for me to make visible my own thinking, as I read the passage. But what I really wish I could do, with any certainty, is make Jesus' thinking visible.

Even though I can't do that for certain, let me tell you what I think Jesus was thinking. Not everything, but some of what he was thinking.

I think that when Jesus saw the crowd "pressing in on him to hear the Word of God," it made him think of something else. He was always making analogies, and here was a good one. The people pressing in on him to hear the word of God were like fish, swarming around something good to eat. Throw a bucket of bait in the water, and I suppose the fish will stop wandering around and they'll all home in on the good food. Well, here were the people acting just like a school of fish, drawn to some great food.

Furthermore, I think Jesus liked the fact that they were all drawn to him, to hear the Word of God, and he wanted to preserve the moment because that was an important part of what he

wanted to do. Sort of like when he talked about wishing he could gather the people of Jerusalem under his wings—but they would not! Or when he talked about being the shepherd, and wanting to get all the sheep into his flock. Or being the vine, and everyone being branches. Or when he wished out loud that the Lord would send workers to gather the harvest, the wheat. Jesus thought the world needed gathering—into one kingdom, under God.

But he needed a net, in order to accomplish this. So, he looked around, and he saw some people whose expertise was in fishing, and he decided they would do. He asked them to come with him and become fishers of people. “From now on you will catch people.” Not as in “hook” them, but as in “gather” them to me.

That is what I think Jesus was thinking.

Furthermore, and this is an extraordinary step, I think that Jesus’ whole mission was to “make God’s thinking visible.” That’s why we refer to Jesus as “The Word of God.” Jesus makes clear to us what God’s thinking is.

Because we’re not too sure, otherwise. Some days, God seems pleased with us. Other days, the evidence is against that. But Jesus wants us to understand that God our Father is always disposed to receive us as beloved children, even when we do wrong. God’s arms are open, just like the arms of the Prodigal Son’s father. God even goes around collecting us, as the Good Samaritan collected the nearly dead man by the side of the road.

God’s gathering-love thinking is made visible in Jesus, because he spends all his time around the edges of God’s flock, bringing back those who have fallen away. I can’t begin to say how many times Jesus says this or demonstrates this. One example is when, in John 12:32, Jesus says, “And I, when I am lifted up, will draw all people to myself.” He meant, when he was lifted up on the cross.

He didn’t say “a lot of people,” or “the best people,” he said “I will draw all people to myself.” Meaning the whole world.

That is wonderful good news, if you have ever been left out. God, who made you and owns you, wants you to be his child.

Jesus makes God’s thinking visible. Not just his thinking, but his heart, his love, his passion for his people. For all of us. Amen.