

**Helping Others Grow**  
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August 1, 2021

And [Jesus] said to them, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find.” So they cast, and now were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish. John 21:6

The disciples had been trying to do something useful, but it wasn't working. Although they were skilled fishermen, they hadn't caught anything. They had fished for a whole night using all their experience and abilities with nothing to show for their efforts. Then the Lord called to them as an unrecognized person on the distant shore and suggested that they fish off the other side of the boat. What must this have sounded like to the disciples? What does it sound like to us? Part of our mind is inclined to see this as an arbitrary and inconsequential matter. Would the fish really be all that different on the right side of the boat? The disciples involved in this story were experienced fishermen who had been fishing all night. They would have thrown their nets in over and over again in any place that seemed like a good spot to catch fish. Why would Jesus advice suddenly lead to a different result.

We are often like these disciples. They appear to represent people who have some knowledge of what is true and good. This knowledge can be either small or great. When first learned however it inevitable that it is truth misunderstood. The teachings for the New Church say that in reality our first understanding of truth is not really truth itself and consequently when we follow it according to our best understanding, we do not do what is genuinely good. When we have this first understanding of truth, it tends to open our eyes to see the errors, confusion, and misunderstanding of others. It is easy for us to think it would be useful for us to correct these problems. But as we begin to try to do this we discover it is not as easy as we might have hoped. People don't automatically accept our suggestions with grateful thanks and immediately correct the problem we have pointed out. As we reflect on this state of affairs, we can end up shaking our heads at the perversity of such people, their apparently determined ignorance, or their lack of understanding. We perhaps unconsciously attribute ill will, or at least the wrong values to the person who doesn't seem to be accepting the help and direction that we are offering. The person seems determined to self-destructive ideas and harmful behavior and he or she seems resolute in this position.

For example, we may observe a coworker's approach to a job and see that he seems consumed with the small parts of it and is forgetting the big picture. We can try to get that coworker to see the bigger perspective, but that person might respond that what he or she is focusing on is important and it sounds like we're asking them to ignore these things.

As we try to deal with friends, aging parents, or a spouse, we can find some of them too demanding on themselves and others or too apathetic and compliant. We can see the consequences of their attitudes, words and actions that hurt themselves and others and we can want to help. But when we point out the errors, faults, and problems, as we try to suggest that there is a better way, in response we get denial, arguments, resentment or even apparent

agreement but no change in opinion or behavior. We are trying to help, but we don't seem to be getting anywhere. It can be frustrating. The amazing thing is that the person we're trying to help may be thinking similar thoughts about us, that we are in error and unwilling to change. The other person is trying and trying to work with us and don't feel like they are getting anywhere. If this pattern develops in a close friendship or especially a marriage it can result in serious difficulties.

What is the problem? Why don't people change as readily as we might wish they would? Aren't we supposed to help? We can even be sure that the Lord wants the person to grow in this area. Sometimes the problem is that we aren't using an approach that the Lord can cooperate with. Do you remember hearing an ancient fable about the wind and sun having a competition to see who could get a traveler to remove his cloak? The wind tried first. He tried to blow the cloak off the traveler by the force of his breath. The harder he tried, the more tightly the traveler clutched his cloak around himself. Finally the wind gave up and the sun took his turn. Instead of trying to force the man, the sun beamed down with a gentle warmth. As the traveler walked along his grip on his cloak loosened and finally the man, of his own free will, decided to remove it.

Sometimes we are too much like the wind in our efforts to change others. We may try with all our might and get nowhere. This lack of results that comes from an unproductive approach is represented by the disciples fishing all night without catching any fish. The Lord comes to us in this state of mind suggesting a different approach. Casting the net on the right side seems to represent three important things.

Firstly it means that as we work with others that we are not supposed to emphasize what might appear to them as abstract rights and wrongs, but instead we are to help them recognize the consequences of their own behavior and the better results that could come from a different approach. We can help them see how true ideas can lead to a better life. The teachings for the New Church refer to this as teaching the good things of charity or a wise kindness versus focusing on the truths of faith separate from life.

The second thing that casting the net on the right side means is that the Lord calls us to live a life of wise kindness ourselves. We read in the teachings for the New Church:

The Lord said, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat," namely, that they should teach the good ways of living. That they would thus convert the Gentiles to the church means by their finding in such abundance that "they were not able to draw the net for the multitude of fishes." (*Apocalypse Explained* 600:7)

One of the very powerful ways that the Lord can teach and lead people in freedom is by helping them to observe the truth wisely lived out in our own lives. We can do the best we can to model what we have seen to be what the Lord wants us to do. The Lord said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)

The third thing that casting the net on the right side seems to mean is that when we try to help others the Lord wants us to be led by a spirit of charity. The teachings for the New Church state: “when good is the side on which people act or teach they net countless items of truth; but not the reverse” (*Arcana Caelestia* 10061:2). Can we feel some patience and mercy for where the person is at present? Can we be tolerant of differences that aren’t in crucial areas? Can we even rejoice in differences that can contribute to overall welfare of the congregation or community? The teachings for the New Church state: “when good is the side on which people act or teach they net countless items of truth; but not the reverse.”

As we try to help others grow and change, the Lord calls us to do our part in a way that He can best work through. He calls us to have an emphasis on what is good, to try to model this life ourselves and to have a spirit of charity or deep kindness that keeps us from being harsh or dogmatic. There are many passages in the teachings for the New Church that speak to our outlook on the differences that we see in the choices of another. As we look at these differences, we read, “If charity is considered the essential thing of the church, then each person would say, in whatsoever worship he might be, ‘This is my brother; I see that he worships the Lord and is a good person’” (*Arcana Caelestia* 2385). And when there is a real basis for trying to help someone else change their outlook or life, the teachings for the New Church speak of them as being “regarded as friends, and are to be instructed and amended” (*Arcana Caelestia* 9255:2).

We as individuals can try to “fish on the right side of the boat” and also as a congregation we can try to have the life of the church reflect the Lord’s call. May our focus be on what good comes from following the truth the Lord has revealed. May we try to model this goodness in the life of this congregation. And may a spirit of charity direct us as we work together to fulfill the uses of a church. We know that we are not all the same. Each Sunday people in the Bryn Athyn community meet at a number of different services. Those attending each service are choosing it for reasons that they think are important. May we try to grow from each other’s perspective on what is important in worship for each of us, tolerating, even rejoicing in differences, although the needs and wants of others may sometimes infringe on our own preferences. Let us dedicate ourselves to “fishing from the right side of the boat” in all that we do as a congregation. Our efforts to do this will not only bless those already within the congregation, but also those who come to it new and recognize the wonderful life that is to arise in the New Church. Our efforts will also bless us as well. Instead of the frustration of being ineffective in what we do, like fishing all night with nothing to show for it, the Lord will work a miracle before our eyes, filling us with a sense of gratitude as we follow the Lord to a bountiful catch of blessings.

Lessons: Jeremiah 17:5-8, John 21:1-11 *Apocalypse Explained* 600:7

### **Jeremiah 17:5-8**

<sup>5</sup> Thus says the LORD: “Cursed *is* the man who trusts in man And makes flesh his strength, Whose heart departs from the LORD.

<sup>6</sup> For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, And shall not see when good comes, But shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, *In* a salt land *which is* not inhabited.

<sup>7</sup> "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, And whose hope is the LORD.

<sup>8</sup> For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, Which spreads out its roots by the river, And will not fear when heat comes; But its leaf will be green, And will not be anxious in the year of drought, Nor will cease from yielding fruit.

### **John 21:1-11**

<sup>1</sup> After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and in this way He showed *Himself*: <sup>2</sup> Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the *sons* of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. <sup>3</sup> Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We are going with you also." They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing. <sup>4</sup> But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "Children, have you any food?" They answered Him, "No." <sup>6</sup> And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find *some*." So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish. <sup>7</sup> Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on *his* outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea. <sup>8</sup> But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far from land, but about two hundred cubits), dragging the net with fish. <sup>9</sup> Then, as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have just caught." <sup>11</sup> Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not broken.

known what "right" and "left" signify, in general and in particular, in the Word of both the New and the Old Testaments,

### ***Apocalypse Explained 600:7***

Jesus said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish. (John 21:6).

Since "fishing" means in the Word the instruction and conversion of people who are in external or natural good [patterns of life], in which good [patterns] were most of the Gentiles at that time, "fish" means the things of the natural person, and "boat" doctrine from the Word; therefore "the right side of the boat" means living good lives. This makes clear the signification of what the Lord said, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat," namely, that they should teach the good ways of living. That they would thus convert the Gentiles to the church means by their finding in such abundance that "they were not able to draw the net for the multitude of fishes." Anyone can see that the Lord would not have commanded them "to cast the net on the right side of the ship" unless the "right side" had been a special meaning.