

TITLE: "You Catch 'em, I'll Clean 'em"

TEXT: John 10:1-10 (NT p. 103)

'Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.' ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷ So again Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Introduction – You catch 'em, I'll clean 'em

When I was in my early teens, I worked on a head boat. Head boats take groups of people out fishing on the ocean. It was my job to pass out rods and bait, untangle lines, gaff fish and clean all the fish on the way in. Sometimes there were hundreds and hundreds of cod, haddock and pollack that needed to be cleaned. The captain's rule was that only the crew cleaned fish on board. So when someone asked if they could clean their own fish, I used to say, "You catch 'em, I'll clean 'em."That is Jesus' word to you and me this morning. Try as we might to do it ourselves, it's only when we are caught by God that Jesus begins to CLEAN UP our lives.

1. Up or down the ladder of salvation

In our text for this morning, Jesus says: "Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief

and a bandit.... I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.”

What does Jesus mean by, “Climbs in by another way?” E. Stanley Jones writes:

That is the attempt to be saved by your own effort, by your own climbing—it is self-salvation. ...There are only two ways to find God. One is to try to find God by climbing the ladder rung by rung to be able to meet God at the topmost rung of worthiness. You do this by your good deeds, by your disciplines, by your meditations, by attendance to duty. This is the EGOCENTRIC attempt at salvation.

The other way is GOD-CENTRIC salvation, where God comes down the ladder to us by [becoming a human being in Jesus Christ] and meeting us, not at the topmost rung of the ladder of worthiness, but at the bottom-most rung as sinners. Jesus says, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” Only at the bottom-most rung are we humble enough to receive salvation as the gift of God. (*In Christ p.34*)

If you climb the ladder of worthiness, the only one you will meet at the top, is you. It's only as a person humbly admits his or her need for Jesus that Jesus meets them at the bottom rung and helps us to climb the ladder to God and eternal life.

2. Up the ladder

A LOT of people try to climb up that ladder by themselves.

One day I picked up a hitchhiker on the way to Ithaca. We got talking and I invited him to church. He asked if people wore suits to church and I said no, that some wore ties and some came in jeans and he could wear whatever was comfortable and not feel out of place. Then he said, “Well, I have to get my life together before I come to church. I said, “That's not the way it works. First you turn to God and THEN Jesus helps you get your life together.” But I never saw him again.

I spoke to someone who had not been in church for quite a while. He said, “I WANT to go to church, but each Sunday, something else seems to come up.” Another person said, “I plan to come back to church when things start to slow down.” Things aren't going to slow down. If Satan can't make us sin, he will make us busy; and that's just as bad. People who are really busy seldom have time for Jesus.

Years ago, a lady who lived in town but didn't go to our church called to say she had cancer and asked me to pray for her. I said I would and invited her to church. She said

she was too ill but would come as soon as her radiation treatments were over. When the treatments were finished and she was “cancer free,” she said, “I don’t want people to think that I came to church just because I had cancer.” When she was sick and scared, she wanted God’s help, but when she got better she no longer needed the Lord.

There are always excuses for NOT following the Lord. One day a man said to Jesus, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” Jesus said to the man, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9: 61, 62). Satan will ALWAYS put something in your path to prevent you from turning back to God and it’s up to you to PERSEVERE in faith.

3. Down the ladder

Sooner or later, every person goes down the ladder of life. God does not mess up people’s lives, nor does God make us busy nor make us ill; we are perfectly capable of doing all of those by ourselves. But God does USE the problems we face in life to make us realize that we DO need Jesus. But we have to be humble enough to accept the fact that we ARE needy and we DO need Jesus. If we don’t, it won’t be long till we face another serious problem. And there are LOTS of problems. This morning I want to preach about physical problems.

a) God does not cause illnesses or injuries, but when they happen, God often uses them to get our ATTENTION.

I have had back problems since my early teens. At times, I have been incapacitated. The last time it was REALLY bad was 1989. Carol’s father had been very ill and we finally received word that he had died. I wrapped things up as best I could here and Carol and I and our 9-year-old twins headed for Connecticut.

On the way, I had back spasms that caused incredible pain. Carol cleared a space in the back of our station wagon so I could lie on my back. She had to put both kids in the front seat and, fortunately we did not get stopped. The rest of the trip was long and painful. At Carol’s parents’ home, I pretty much had to lie flat on the floor.

Since I had time to think, I realized that I was angry. I had been working over 70 hours a week and was very stressed already. On top of that, Carol’s father and I had been very close and his death was quite a blow to me. His death also brought me back to the emotional stress I experienced when my own father died when I was seven. After sifting through a lot of these feelings I was, basically, mad at God.

Don't be afraid of being angry at God, by the way. God can take it. However, as my mother used to say, "Don't cut off your nose to spite your face." This is true with God. Get mad at God and distance yourself from the Lord and you cut yourself off from the Power that can heal whatever ails you.

When I finally forgave God and simply asked why both of the fathers in my life had to leave me, God said, "I am your Father." These were not just WORDS that came to my mind. I looked back over my life and I saw how God HAD been a Dad to me. ...Once I got back in touch with God, my back started getting better right away and I was able to attend the funeral and return to Dryden and go back to work.

God does not cause illnesses or injuries, but when they happen, God often uses them to get our attention.

b) God does not cause illnesses or injuries, but when they happen, God uses them for our GOOD.

I loved commercial fishing. I loved going out on that head boat during my teen years. I loved lobstering. After college graduation, I drove to Florida and got a job on a shrimp boat. If you have seen the Discovery Channel's show "Deadliest Catch" about crab fishing off the coast of Alaska, you know what commercial fishing is like. Now picture doing that in the Gulf of Mexico instead of the Bearing Sea, using nets instead of traps and working in temperatures in the 90s instead of in the minus numbers and you have some idea of what shrimping is like. It's tough work. Once we worked 18 hours a day for 17 days straight. Sometimes between hauling the nets we had a 15 or 20 minute break. I was so tired I could sleep standing up leaning against the deck house in heavy seas.

I loved it, but my back wouldn't take it. After the first few days, I was in constant pain. ...Sometimes, when things are tough for me in the ministry, and I watch "Deadliest Catch," it looks pretty good to me. ...Then God gently reminds me that I would not last a day on the Bearing Sea, or anywhere else, because of my back.

Romans 8:28 tells us: "...all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose." Like the disciples Peter and John, the Lord has called me to leave my nets and be a "fisher of people." And, difficult as that is for me some of the time, I know in my heart that it brings me more joy, more peace and more satisfaction than commercial fishing ever could.

If we love God, and allow ourselves to BE called according to God's purpose, even our physical problems will be used for our good.

c) God does not cause illnesses or injuries, but when they happen, God will HEAL us one way or another.

As I have said many times before, I believe in direct and complete healing from God and that IS the way God works sometimes. That's not what happened to me. Over the years, I have learned some things that have helped me to cope with my back problems. I drink plenty of water because back muscles can spasm if they get dehydrated. I lift with my legs more than my back. I try to carry heavy loads equally in both hands.

I do exercises that strengthen the muscles on either side of my spinal column and I do them 4 or 5 times each week. I try walk for a couple miles, or use my elliptical machine, 4 to 5 times a week. I don't like to do any of these things, but I know I have to endure a little discomfort for short periods of time or I will have to deal with a LOT of discomfort for a long period of time.

Sometimes God heals us directly. Sometimes it is a process and God uses doctors, medication, diet, and other people to help in the healing process. However we know, if we have faith in Jesus Christ, that not matter our problems are here on earth, we will be completely healed when we get to heaven.

Conclusion – Come to the banquet

Let me close with a story. This one's by Jesus (Luke 14:16-24):

“Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come; for everything is ready now.’ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets.’ Another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets.’ Another said, ‘I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.’

So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.'

And the slave said, 'Sir, what you have ordered has been done, and there is still room.' Then the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.'"

That's what God is doing in India, in Africa, in France, in Australia, in China and right here in Dryden. Jesus is saying: "Come to my banquet." "I have come that you may have life, and have it abundantly." And if you come to the banquet, if you humbly cling to Jesus, you will have abundant life, forever and ever and ever.

Amen.