

## *Fish in the water*

### *Psalm 128 and Luke 5:1-11*

Imagine someone you trust: the kind of someone that when they say something, no matter how strange, you say, “well if you say so.” I hope you have one or two people in your life like that. Sometimes, it comes from someone who we trust because we have known them for so long that we have seen evidence of their trustworthiness. Other times, it is because we know their credentials. This happens sometimes when we ask someone for their life’s story since they are the expert, they tell their story and we can trust that even though it seems odd or strange to us it is their story to tell.

Other times, the credentials are more formal. Reading a book or an essay, I am someone who am more likely to trust someone who has work experience or research experience in an area than say a blogger, who all I know is his name is John. It is not that John is lying, it’s that I don’t know John. I don’t know what his experience is, and I don’t know if he is trying to get a point across out of anger or out of love. And that’s another thing about people we trust; people we trust can feel angry around us. And if we trust them and listen hard enough, we will trust again that is truly how they are feeling and that they have reason to feel that, even if we do not feel the same way about the situation.

Simon Peter felt this way about Jesus, (“If you say so”) but even during that exact same day, the exact same hour Simon Peter also didn’t trust Jesus. Because while he did what Jesus said he would do, he then fell on his knees and said, ‘I am not worthy of this.’ For a moment he doubted Jesus’ perspective, Jesus’ understanding of who he was. Jesus said, as Karen did, “Yes, *you!* We need you here, as you are, whether you be silly or serious. We need you to be you.” But sometimes, even the people we trust the most, when they say that to us, we have that doubt. Am I worthy of this much love and acceptance?

Then there are the times where people we trust tell us we have done something wrong. Now, when just anyone tells us we have done something wrong, we don’t have to take it seriously; we may choose to. But when someone we know or want to know, tells us of something we have done that has hurt them we need to say, ‘Oh, if you say so.’ We may not understand how our words hurt them, but we need to be willing to listen, to learn. The goal is to not hurt them again.

One of the ways we humans bump into each other is through what is called internalized and externalized culture. Karen and I have been doing some reading and Eric Law had the most helpful metaphor for me for this. I love going to someone's home and having them make me something their grandma taught them to make. Often this is something my grandmother would not have ever made. Sometimes, there's spices in it. Sometimes, it's lamb. My mother would not know what to do with a lamb. Sometimes it's a mix of flavours that aren't my cup of tea. Other times I think, oh my gosh how can I get this recipe so that we can try this at home. And when we have those experiences, we are sharing with one another our external cultures.

It is the same if you go to someone's wedding and you find out that in their tradition all of the women wear something on their heads, a scarf or a hat, before the ceremony, and we put on a scarf or hat that is lent to us. We are overjoyed to be able to be part of something different because we love this person and we want to get to know them. My favorite experience of this was when I was in Greece, and we went to a nunnery and right at the door were these beautiful women who had lived there, many, many years; and they would give every person they identified as a woman coming in, a skirt. The skirts were very ugly, because they were made from hand-me-down rags and they were very big, not only because they needed to fit everybody size, but also over top of the clothes of every body size. (So, you can imagine me, I had to twist mine up a little bit and hold it.) This offering was their way of saying, 'you come in as you are, and you add one item and that will help us feel more comfortable with your presence here.'

What is more difficult is to learn about what is called internal culture. And Eric Law says that the best way to think about this is by thinking that you are an iceberg. All the things you do on the external, that people notice, are your external culture. I speak English, I speak English with an Alberta accent. I can't hear it, but I've heard it's true. I wear clothes of a certain class and I wear comfortable clothes. All these things tell people things about me.

But occasionally, I feel like I have bumped up against someone and I don't know why and that's because deep under my body are my roots. Those cultural learnings that I have had throughout centuries and they have come up and I don't usually see them. I'm floating on the water, I am good to go and suddenly, I go clunk, because the bottom of my iceberg has hit yours and I didn't mean to bump into you, but I often forget how large my internal culture is.

This happened for me when I was in Quebec. I was in Quebec City, and I was relearning my French. Quebec City has a wonderful tradition wherein if you try to speak French, they love it; they try to honour it. And even though you sound atrocious, or as I was specifically told; 'Oh you're from Alberta,' they would lean in and do the hard work of trying to understand what I was saying. Then they would correct the word I was trying to say to the right word. It was quite marvelous. I began to think how hard I needed to work at listening. How many times have I spoken to someone for whom English is a second or third language and I get impatient. I want to think, 'why haven't you learned my language?', when really, I could learn from the Quebecois who would say, 'keep going, you are doing great. I don't know what you are trying to say, but

we are going to figure it out together.’ And in that way, we celebrate their work of learning English and I practice my patience.

But there are more invisible pieces of work being done. Sometimes, and I giggled with Marlilee about this because she and Iboth have very loud voices, and even with loud voices we need to use a microphone, because no matter how loud I speak, I still am speaking at a tone that some people cannot hear. *They* need the microphone to help them hear. And, it is way easier for me to use a microphone than it is for them to strain to hear me. Life is like this. Sometimes something that is so simple for us to do - we don’t want to do, but it is so simple.

In my internal culture, I was raised to work hard. We called it the Protestant work ethic and it meant that it was your job, if you wanted something done, to do it. Or, since we are having our Annual Congregational Meeting this morning, I will use meeting metaphors, I was taught if you want something done, you make a Motion. If you don’t know what making a Motion is, it is when you stand up and say, ‘I move that this church remove all of its carpets and replace it with pink shag carpets.’ Now, more than likely, I don’t know, but the group might decide through voting that this is not a wise decision. I may not even get someone to second the Motion, which lets it move forward through the process. (Voice in background, ‘I second the Motion.’)

Now, what you have just seen is examples of this culture. When you want something done, or you see something that needs doing, you speak up. Now notice, I did not invite Lynn to speak, nor those trusted tenors, but they did; and that is because in their internal culture they know they have the privilege and power to do that here.

But some folks come, and their lower iceberg says, ‘I will not speak until I am invited to speak.’ And it’s not because they don’t have a good Protestant work ethic, it’s because they were taught in their culture that you wait and when you are invited to speak you will be listened to. So, and Lynn and I have been in these situations, I am sure you as well, there are times when I need to be quieter, and I dislike it. But what it reminds me of is that when I am speaking, some people do not believe they can interrupt me, and I need to be quiet. It is easier for me to be quiet than it is for them to break their cultural rules and interrupt me.

Privileges is like that...hard to notice but it can hinder others. They come in all shapes and sizes and they are often things we do not see and that is why I quoted Ani diFranco in the sermon title. Ani diFranco says, ‘Oh they are like fish in the water who don’t know they are wet.’ **They are like fish in the water who don’t know they are wet.** Now, first, it is probably not the fishes’ job to know they’re wet, however, when I start thinking about it, I think, ‘oh my gosh, how many things do I walk into a room with that: I don’t notice because it’s the air I breath.’ I know how to make a Motion at a meeting; via Roberts or Bourinot's rules. That is a very culturally specific way of running a meeting.

Each culture has its rules. So just as if I went into an indigenous community and they were about to make a decision, I could make a Motion and I would be gently told that they have no idea why

that has any power in the room because that is not how decisions are made in that community. Being aware of that others may not know how decisions are made helps us invite people into the meeting.

What is being asked of us? For example: If you know you have privilege because of your skin colour, perhaps your name is easy to spell or easy to pronounce, perhaps you live somewhere, like I do where my accent isn't heard because I am where I learned how to speak English...

What exactly is expected of me - because I am not taking off my skin and am not going to unlearn how to speak English with an Alberta accent. So, I quote now from Laurie Laken-Hutchinson. She wrote an article trying to help us understand. She is African-American and has often found herself with closed doors in front of her just because of her skin colour. She says that "*what is being asked of you* to acknowledge is that white privilege, economic privilege, other privileges do exist. This does not mean that you are supposed to treat people different than you but treat them the same way as you. Don't do this to be nice do this to stand up for fair treatment and justice. Don't let the off-colour joke go by. Don't let someone assuming something go by without challenge and please continually make the effort. Put yourself in someone else's shoes so that we may all cherish our unique contributions to society." That we may all cherish our unique contributions to Robertson-Wesley as much as we can.

Today Peter cried out. He had seen a miracle, he had heard Jesus' teaching and he said, 'I am not worthy. I am going to mess this up. This power you give us is too great for me.' And Jesus said, 'do not be afraid. From now on you are going to go out and catch people. And you are going to go to the powerless and catch people. And we are going to go to the voiceless and teach them how to catch people. We are going to go to those people who are struggling with language and listen, and we are going to turn to whoever shows up last at the table and ask them to say grace. May we all listen. May we all speak up. And, may you all remember Jesus calls you because you are all worthy of God's love. Amen.