
They Cast Their Nets in Galilee

An article from the *Cathedral Times*.

With gratitude, I repeat here the holy and haunted lines from the poem of William Alexander Percy, written in 1924, and now published as Hymn 661 in our hymnal:

*They cast their nets in Galilee
Just off the hills of brown
Such happy simple fisherfolk
Before the Lord came down*

*Contented peaceful fishermen
Before they ever knew
The peace of God That fill'd their hearts
Brimful and broke them too.*

*Young John who trimmed the flapping sail,
Homeless, in Patmos died.
Peter, who hauled the teeming net,
Head-down was crucified.*

*The peace of God, it is no peace,
But strife closed in the sod,
Yet, brothers, pray for but one thing—
The marvelous peace of God.*

I admit to being among the many southerners proud of the Percy family. I suppose there's hardly any old South family, certainly no one around New Orleans, who does not know someone related to one of the Percys.

There are fewer, however, who know of the hardships and pain of that family, even though William Alexander's cousin-once-removed, Walker Percy, expressed them well in all his fictional work (and his truthful essays, too!). Still fewer, probably, would be able to speak of the particularly religious sentiments of that family legacy.

It is the fourth stanza of William Alexander Percy's moving poem, that captures—in a southern rural way—the Christian gospel task: “The peace of God, it is no peace,/ But strife closed in the sod,/ Yet, brothers, pray for but one thing— / The marvelous peace of God.”

This Sunday, our gospel lesson will recount for us the calling of four fishermen into the fold of the disciples of Jesus: Andrew and Simon Peter, and James and John. They became, probably, the closest followers and friends of our Lord. But they were ordinary people, rural people. They were fisherfolk, accustomed to making a living in uncertain, but hard-working ways.

Though we tend to think of “fishing,” these days, as some peaceful and leisurely endeavor, true fishermen know it is hard work. Those who must make a living from fishing know that their livelihood depends upon random weather, equipment repaired over and over again, and simply the vagaries of where fish might be.

In fact, most of us make a living like that. There is little in our daily lives that we can truly depend upon. Fishermen serve, therefore, as symbols for all of us. The first followers of Jesus were regular people, making a regular living, praying for the peace of God. That peace was often strife, but it was worth it.

Join your fellow fisherfolk this Sunday at church and join people just like you, people who work for peace even when it seems like strife sown in the sod. When we come together in Christ, something marvelous happens: the marvelous peace of God.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

© The Cathedral of St. Philip. All rights reserved.