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Fish and Bread

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Fish and Bread

Abstract

"The wonder of the world is tied up in a child, a bobber, and a fish."

Posting about deeply satisfying experiences in life from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/fish-and-bread/>

Keywords

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Disciplines

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.

Fish and Bread

The portage from South Kawishiwi River to Clear Lake was a quarter mile and of average difficulty as portages go: rocks, a couple of hills, a tree in the middle of the path to bend the canoe around, and two muddy sections to be stepped carefully through, as well as the usual congeries of bugs trapped under the canoe and mosquitoes dive-bombing my head—all pretty standard stuff for the Boundary Waters Canoe Area.

This was day two of the trip, day one having produced no fish, and the portage was already one strike against Clear: the lake owed us two walleyes to account for the work and mosquito bites it took to get there.

It was easier to fish from islands with my nine-year-old, Aidan, and so we let the wind butt our canoe up against one of the rocky outcroppings and tried both bobber fishing and casting jigs, to no avail. The shore across the narrows from this island had both a clear weed line and was out of the wind, so I paddled us over to it and, as Aidan casted his jig, I tossed a bobber out the back of the canoe. After reorganizing some clutter at my feet, I looked back but couldn't find my bobber. Hurriedly, I grabbed my pole again, set the hook and found a pulsing weight at the end of my line. Moments later, I landed a small walleye, torsional and thick with muscle, its coloring both dark and particularly golden to match the tea-colored water.

The beauty of that one fish covered the cost of the portage.

For the next hour, I kept the canoe in place while an almost giddy Aidan casted out his bobber and watched it disappear, set the hook and reeled in four more dark golden walleyes. Then we paddled to another little rock island where we met another canoe from our group and caught several more fish.

That evening, we filleted those fish and ate a meal of golden walleye fillets cooked over a fire.

It stormed that night, and the storm brought a weather change; the warm southerly wind switched to a stiff Northwester. But we needed fish for day three meals, so we set out for Clear Lake once again the next morning. In fact, Aidan and I made the portage there and back not once but twice, facing a cold wind and waves in clothes that were too thin so that we might watch our bobbers go down and reel up dark, golden walleyes.

The whole boundary waters experience is intense: the physical labor of canoeing and camping combined with the leisure of fishing; the balanced canvas of water, rocks, trees, and sky, to say nothing of sunrises, sunsets, storms, and stars.

I hesitate to say that fishing makes me feel most alive, that it makes my heart sing, because it seems cliché. But it does. Especially after a year of academic labors, after trying to untangle the ideas of the world in ways that students will understand, after organizing papers on a desk underneath fluorescent lights and arranging digital schedules on a world wide web, I need to know that a world exists apart from these things. For me, fishing brings me contact with that world. And with, God the creator of that world.

And for me, it's not about some glamorous place. The wonder of the world is tied up in a child, a bobber, and a fish. It was this way, sitting on the rocks of dingy Lake Shetek, that my dad taught me about spiritual life. With patience, with hope in the unseen, even with prayer, we waited, sought contact from an invisible world beneath the surface of the deep. And to feel the weight of a fish, to see a silver crappie or jeweled walleye was to receive a manna-like blessing from a God who sustained us invisibly from somewhere beyond or within this whole magnificent production that we call the world.

For me, too, some of the most deeply satisfying words from scripture are in this vein. The disciples are in what I can only imagine is spiritual limbo: Christ had risen—but what does that mean? And so Peter turns to what he had always known: fishing. After being out all night, they've caught nothing until a man on shore—Jesus—tells them to cast their nets out on the other side of the boat. The weight and the pull then must have felt like the fulfillment of prophecy, like the fulfillment of history itself; it must have felt like the bounty of all creation. And Peter leaves his nets once again, wades to shore to find more blessing, “a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.” But what the disciples have done is significant too: “Bring some of the fish you have just caught,” Jesus instructs. Then, these comforting words: “Come and have breakfast.”

We cannot live on bread alone, or fish. But we cannot live without them either. We're called to drop our nets, our poles, and follow Him, but we're also affirmed in the stuff of the world, in the fish and bread and burning coals to cook them on, and a meal already prepared after a long, dark night.

“Bring some of the fish you have caught,” Jesus says. “Come and have breakfast.”