

The Witness

Rev. Robin Wells

Will you take a moment to pray with me?

O God, your will is that all your children should grow into fullness of life.

We lift to you today the ministry of scouting.

We offer you thanks for camping,

to teach us that the world is our great home;

for study and work, to build character;

for service, to see our responsibility to those in need;

for encouragement in genuine patriotism and vital faith.

Bless the work of scouting, in this place and around the world,

that, through its efforts, the young may, like our Lord,

increase in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with you and all people.

Amen. (-Mark Trotter)

On this Celebration of Scouting Sunday, I am reminded of my own participation in Girl Scouting. I first became a Girl Scout as a second-grader. I was of an age when I could be a Brownie girl scout and it was during a time when the Daisy level of Girl Scouting was just being introduced for girls in kindergarten.

Though I missed out on being a Daisy Girl Scout, as a Brownie, I was very determined to sell at least 75 boxes of Girl Scout Cookies so I could win the prize of a Girl Scout tote bag. Unfortunately, that was the same year that I had chicken pox and I couldn't go door to door to sell cookies the way most girls did back then.

This next part of the story is a bit of a confession: My mom worked in a large office for the County of San Diego. So with the cookie sign up sheet and the story of a sick Girl Scout at home, the cookie orders came in quickly through my mom's office and I reached my sales goal in no time, really through no effort of my own.

But as I progressed in scouting, I found that cookie sales were only a small part of what I was to experience. I learned how to paddle a canoe as a Girl Scout, and this no doubt helped me in learning to do stand-up paddleboarding as an adult.

Most of my camping experience with the Girl Scouts happened at the beach. Our troop would participate in the annual Canoe Regatta on Fiesta Island in San Diego. If you have ever tried to pitch a tent in windy weather, you know how easily that tent can become a kite. But even worse than setting up a tent in windy weather is setting up a tent *on the sand* in windy weather.

Through Girl Scouting, I made childhood friends that I have kept to this day. One scouting friend went on to earn her degrees to become a librarian of a university. Another Girl Scout friend grew up to join the US Army and then later became a probation officer. And as you see today, I eventually became a pastor.

As Girl Scouts, we were encouraged and empowered to do anything we had set our minds to, because we had wonderful leaders cheering us on to become leaders ourselves.

Scouting changes lives in so many ways, but I think most of all, scouting helps a child to wonder about the world outside of themselves and how they fit into it.

Through camp songs, stories, and skits-- badges earned and good deeds done, young people are shaped into people of positive character, goodwill, and motivation to change the world for the better.

So today I'd like to share a story from the Bible that relates to this stained glass window of Jesus standing in a boat. If you stick around through the fellowship hour and come back here at noon today, I will be available to give a tour of these windows and how they speak to our faith in this place.

Now, if Jesus was a Girl Scout, and had gotten his canoeing permit, he would know that standing in a small boat on the water is not impossible, but it's pretty risky. Standing in a small boat takes a steady balance so you don't overturn your boat and fall into the water! But here is Jesus, doing what most people would not do and doing the work of God at the same time.

Jesus borrowed this boat from an old fisherman named Simon who Jesus would befriend and later rename Peter.

When we read of these first disciples of Jesus, these fishermen, we might wonder what would cause them to follow the advice of a carpenter, to go out into the deep water, and to drop their nets.

We might wonder why after netting an abundance of fish, the fishermen abandon that huge haul, and immediately follow this stranger, Jesus, who invites them into an alternative way of life.

These fishermen already know how to fish in order to sustain themselves and their family, and quite likely their community too.

Why would they want anything else for themselves besides the good advice Jesus had given them? What would cause these fishermen to leave everything behind and follow Jesus?

Remember: While the crowds were listening to Jesus preaching and teaching from the boat, Simon and the other fishermen were busy washing their nets. They were not the audience for Jesus' teaching and preaching that day.

The fishermen had been fishing all night long but had caught nothing, so in their minds, they were done for the rest of the day and they were probably a bit upset about the way the night had gone for them.

I cannot help but think that for these fishermen, this night without a catch spoke to the greater heartbreak in the life of their community. The Gospel of Matthew describes the people of this region as the ones "who lived in the region and in shadow of death." That's pretty dire. It sounds like they are living in a hopeless place. These fishermen

had probably seen and experienced profound evil in their lives and in their land. They most likely had been dealing with situations beyond their control, and they may have even wondered from time to time if God had abandoned them.

Their experience of the world could not be denied, and this man from Nazareth in his preaching and teaching cast a net of light where there was once darkness-- hope where there was once despair.

And yet, the temptation when there is no light is to stay in the dark—to remain hidden—undercover-- to remain unseen—to stay invisible and not draw attention.-- to not venture out of the comfort of the darkness and into the places we cannot see.

But Jesus, after he had finished speaking to the crowds, sought out these individual fishermen, the ones who worked in the dark of night, and he spoke to the depths of their souls. Jesus was willing to go out into the deep water with them in the light of the day.

The truth of the matter is, Jesus told these fishermen exactly what they knew how to do already but they hadn't been doing it because they had gotten into a rut.

The fishermen had fallen into a pattern of fishing only at night, perhaps to avoid the tax collectors or other bandits and thugs that were active during the day. Why else would Jesus tell them, "Do not be afraid?" He surely wasn't talking about being afraid of the flopping fishes or the breaking nets—these are just things.

What really mattered then and what really matters today are people—people who need to be fed, not only by their own labor, but by the labors of others. When the fishermen were hurting, the entire community was hurting.

The time had come for the fishermen to change and they knew it because of their life changing encounter with Jesus. This is why they left everything and followed him.

In a similar way, scouts follow their troop leaders and put their trust in them to lead them in ways that will help them learn and grow. Through mentoring and inspiring kids to be their best selves, scoutmasters and troop leaders see kids for who they really are, and they help to shape and mold their character in ways that help their inner light shine bright in the world.

And so we thank God today for scoutmasters and troop leaders. May the light of their love of scouting shine into the lives of our young people who then in turn shine their light into the rest of the world.

Let us all claim for ourselves today that old camp song, "This little light of mine."

Everywhere you go, and all through the night, let that light shine as a hope for a better world today and always.

Amen.