

The Net - The Net, The River, And Our Unforgettable Baptism

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"Again, the kingdom of God is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind . . ."
Matthew 13:47

In 1976 I was 26 years old and a relatively new member in the Unification Movement, and I was beginning a two-year course of study at the Unification Theological Seminary in Barrytown, New York.

Our studies were highlighted by visits from Rev. Sun Myung Moon who frequently came to informally talk with the seminarians. We listened eagerly for hours, sitting on the lawn or on the banks of the Hudson, as he touched our hearts and imaginations, taking our education upon his own shoulders not only by starting the seminary for us but by regularly searching for ways to teach and strengthen us for the challenging path ahead. Naive and unjaded by the world, we listened with little comprehension and appreciation of the gravity of the things said - much as my children would do decades later when I would try to convey to them my life's lessons. Such, it seems, is the relation of teacher to student and parent to child.

So, one day Father showed up at the crack of dawn and unloaded boxes filled with small lead weights, crates of cork, spools of nylon twine and rope from his car. It was not at first apparent where this was all heading, but years later, in retrospect, it became clear that he had come upon an idea of how to convey the essence of all that he could teach in one week's long, unforgettable experience.

Speaking in Japanese, he directed some of the elder Japanese seminarians to take positions assisting him, whereupon he set about his chosen task with urgent intensity. Using a plastic guide, roughly the length and size of a finger, that functioned like a needle, the nylon twine became alive in Father's hands as he skillfully proceeded to attach the lead weights to the nylon rope. This went on for a considerable time, as we who gathered tried to understand the mystery that was transpiring. Few, if any of us, had a clue. Yet we all became engrossed in the scene before us and convinced of its importance, as we witnessed Father's absolute absorption in his task.



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As the hours went by, it became apparent to me that a wordless sermon was being preached. A many-faceted revelation into the life of the True Father was unfolding - being received by each student on the frequency to which his faith was attuned. And as I watched, it became apparent that all the commotion

was about, of all things, a net! "A net! What for?" I asked myself.

Hours swept by and I noticed that Father never took a break; neither eating, drinking nor even relieving himself. But then again, my attendance was on and off. And what started out as hours soon became days. Yes, "days," for the net being made was no ordinary net. It was a massive work of living art unfolding yard after yard through a multitude of minuscule but painstaking stitches one after another. In fact, each stitch required several loops and turns of the stitching tool, after which the twine would be pulled tight, leaving a knot fixed in place. This tedious process went on knot after seemingly endless knot as the uniform structure of a net took shape.

And the hours turned into days - but regretfully, lacking the historical sense of a scribe, I failed to take note of just how many days had transpired. Regardless, one thing was apparent: few seminarians could keep pace with the master weaver. Our intensity wavered. We came and we went, each according to his or her various constitutions, connection to what was taking place, and class schedule. However, Father's dedication was as steady as a rock. He even worked late into the night, for which spotlights were brought outside so the work could continue. However, each night, one by one, most of the seminarians faded away to their beds as the hours wore on. Those who stayed were the ones, usually elder members, who could truly intuit the importance of this Korean man and his mysterious activities.

Years later, when pondering that period of time, I felt a great sense of shame at my lack of understanding and wavering attendance. But I, like many others, could only superficially perceive what was happening there in the early Spring of 1977. Now I dread to think what realization may come to me when Father's life is over. Will I one day wake up to realize the awful magnitude of all that I failed to fully grasp - much as the disciples of Jesus later did?

As things turned out, only a few knew just when True Father went to rest after each day's toil. But there he would be again early next morning, and another day would unfold, with beads of sweat forming on his face as he weaved on, unifying corks, weights, and rope into one harmonious creation.

Finally, the day arrived when the net making came to completion. Spiritually speaking, it seemed to have taken a long time. To my poetic soul, the net had an invisible dimension stretching into eternity, but in reality, it must have been about one to two hundred feet long and about four feet in height. Certainly, some of the students and faculty thought, "Now that the net mania is over ,perhaps things will be returning to normal." But that was hardly to be the case.

The River

Soon thereafter, we were invited to go carp fishing in the lagoon - a small body of water just below the seminary property, connected to the Hudson River by a narrow inlet over which a railroad trestle passed. It was then that many of us realized that this type of net was not the sort to be pulled by a boat but one that was to be held at chest height while wading through water - much as they do in Asia! It was incredible to think that soon we would all be in the Hudson's wintry water, moving in unison, attempting to herd unseen fish into the confines of the closing net!

Although it was April, the river had yet to break free from winter's icy essence. This being the case, a judgment day was fast approaching as the call came for us minister trainees to muster and descend into what would turn out to be bone-chilling water.

Intuiting that such might be the case, we zealots quickly wondered how to stave off the cold. On one hand, it seemed as if we were in the grip of some hysteria. As mad as lemmings gathering to dash off a cliff into the sea, we feverishly donned layers of shirts, sweatshirts, coats, pants and even sneakers, all the time gathering our determination to make the unthinkable happen! Vainly, we hoped to insulate ourselves from the experience. It was a sight to behold. Certainly, we candidate "messiahs" knew some bizarre adventure awaited us, but not even in our wildest dreams did we imagine the upcoming reality of our imminent baptism. Fishing in and of itself sounded somewhat romantic, but many were now not so sure that this was the sort of fishing they really wanted to do. Some began to ask themselves why they were there at the Seminary in the first place; some admitted that they didn't even like the smell or slimy nature of fish to begin with. Still many others never entertained such questions and were ready to follow Father anywhere, even believing, as he promised, that there were beautiful golden carp lurking where none could be seen.

Finally at the lagoon's edge, we 100 or so students of the first and second Seminary classes, as well as some visiting church leaders, positioned ourselves along the net and proceeded into the water as Father watched from a commanding rowboat.

Deathly Immersion and Rescue

Unless one has been in early post-winter water, it is hard to imagine just how cold that water was. But

suffice it to say that even before I was deeply immersed, I could barely breathe, for that water was such a shock to my system. Still, I thought, "I will adjust. It's just a matter of time." The thought that this was a good condition to unite with Father pushed me on.

Soon I was shoulder-deep in the water. It helped to know that Father was there watching. My fellow seminarians tried to imagine just what the temperature was, as if some process of rationality might make the situation more bearable, but it was a comfortless task. We net holders moved slowly forward, sweeping it along the lagoon's bottom. It was an awkward process as we trudged through the deep mud. Progress seemed awfully slow; perhaps an hour-plus had transpired. But after a while, time itself also froze and I could no longer determine just how long I had been in the water - was it minutes or an hour?

I don't know exactly when but, at some point, I ceased to notice anyone else, so violently was I shivering. My bones began to sound like dice shaking in a cup. My jaw was chattering like some sort of machine gun. I was taken aback to find myself powerless to stop the incessant sound of my own teeth clacking together.

Nonetheless, I found it hard to entertain the thought of leaving the water, especially knowing Father was watching. "Wouldn't it bring some sort of sadness to Father to see everyone leave?" I remembered the story of when Father was in Hungnam prison, his bones rattling in the frigid air of North Korea's winter as the prison guards called everyone out in their thin garments for morning roll call. "Father could not leave the prison," I thought. That recollection gave me the tenacity to persevere through this my own Calgary; I must not abandon him as the disciples did Jesus! I do not remember much after that, for then my very thoughts also grew slow and numb.

I was literally and unknowingly crossing over the borderline between life and death. I no longer possessed the faculty of rational thought. I had heard of "hypothermia" before, but had no idea of how it subtly saps a person's life force, fogging the brain and lulling the mind into a deceptive sleep before death. I certainly did not imagine that I was progressing through its classic symptoms. I only knew I was cold, very cold - the coldest I had ever been - but I did not know that my core body temperature was dropping below the level necessary for survival. It was only a matter of time before my situation would become irreversible.

. . . To make a long story short, at one point I was jolted briefly awake as I was pulled out of the water (by Gerhard Peemoeller, Father's hulking bodyguard) into a boat, sometime thereafter, finding myself in the seminary kitchen on a blanket on the floor next to the open doors of the ovens! I passed out again. Then later, I briefly came back to consciousness in the seminary infirmary, my body shaking convulsively like a runaway locomotive speeding uncontrollably downhill over a broken railroad bed. Eventually I came to my full senses and emerged from that terrible gauntlet . . .

Conclusion

Now, years later, as I reflect on that whole experience - the net, the river, and our unforgettable baptism - the memory, like vintage wine, brings warmth to my heart. I savor the great meaning of Father's incredible love: the love that had sought to painstakingly raise us seminarians into those who might make a difference in this world. A father's love, I can now understand, is tough love, disciplined love, a love that can mold a soul into something bigger, something whole much like how a sword is taken from the fire and plunged into water to temper it. A love that calls for us to rise above ourselves.

Now as I reflect upon that time, it seems to me to be a metaphor for the mission of the True Father: his burning heart's tireless and little-understood efforts to raise up small messiahs, educated in mind and spirit, who could survive the ups and downs of the harsh path of restoration/salvation. The net became for me a metaphor for True Father's life's work, woven from his very soul. Through that experience I came to see that Father's whole life had been dedicated to making a net. Every day was a sacrifice to fashion a way to "catch" the world's people and move them higher. Each length of twine symbolized one of Father's heart strings. Each knot symbolized a meeting, a rally, a speech, a tour - a thankless, seemingly never-ending task undertaken without complaint - the science conferences, the businesses, the Blessings, the foundations and federations, the publications, the performing arts enterprises, and so on.

Hands hurting, back aching, mouth parched, and yet smiling and still encouraging others - this is the True Father I will always remember. Yet who could see into that heart? Who knew the story behind the beaming smile; the tearful path behind the man? He never talked of his worn, tired body. He never talked of his prison time or of those who had tortured and mistreated him. Only those who had or would in the future walk a similar path would or could know. Only those who had held the net, in its broadest sense, and walked with it into the deepest and coldest waters would have some connection with Father. Because of this and many other experiences, I and so many others can never forget True Father, our great anointing now being how to pass on Father's legacy as embodied in that net-making event and use to relatives, friends, descendants and the world beyond.

(Written in 2000, approximately 24 years after the event.)