

The Star Thrower

Luke 6: 17-21; 27-36

We have begun the Year of Our Lord, 2025. Lets' make it a Year of the Lord! And it is Epiphany Eve, when the Eastern Orthodox Church around the world celebrates their Christmas Eve in the most beautiful of services.

Epiphany means “Manifestation” and the Season of Epiphany is about the manifestation of God’s light and love in the ministry of Jesus. I like to call this season “The Season of Light, Water and Miracles.”

Today’s sermon is about Jesus the Star Thrower. The image comes from a famous essay by Loren Eiseley, anthropologist and educator, “The Star Thrower.” I use it to introduce the beginnings of the ministry of Jesus in Luke’s gospel. Settle in and hear the story.

I

He was a scientist combing the beach of Costabel, Eiseley begins, seeing what the ocean had yielded up onto its sandy shore. He saw tiny shells, a small octopus dying on the sand, and he saw hundreds of starfish the stormy waters had washed ashore during the night.

It was just before dawn, and he saw another kind of death at work: professional shellers greedily gathering starfish and stuffing them into their bags, bags now of dying starfish.

He walked around a bluff. There in the distance, beneath a rainbow, he saw a tiny human figure. He saw the man pick up some object and fling it into the breaking surf. As he moved closer he saw the man reach down and pick up...a starfish.

“It’s still alive”, Eiseley offered.

“Yes” said the man, and he took the star and spun it far into the sea. “It may live”, he said, “if the offshore pull is strong enough.”

“Do you collect?” Eiseley asked.

“Only for the living,” the man said, then threw another star. “The stars throw well,” he said. “One can help them.”

Eiseley walked on. As he reached a bend in the shore, he turned, looked back, and saw the man toss another star. “For a moment,” he wrote later in his essay, “in the changing light, the sower appeared magnified, as though casting larger stars upon some greater sea. He had... the posture of a god.”

But then Eiseley’s eyes refocused and his scientist’s mind startled back into motion, and he said, “No, he is a man ...the star thrower is a man, and death is running more fleet than he along every sea beach in the world.”

As he walked along he pondered Darwin and nature's law of tooth and claw. He pondered Freud and the inner struggle between darkness and light in the human soul. He thought about the twisters which roared across plains of his boyhood, wreaking destruction, and he saw in his mind's eye the old photograph of his mother as a child clinging to her sister, her eyes already troubled.

He remembered the biblical injunction, "Love not the world...neither the things that are in the world." And he thought to himself, "But I DO love the world. I love its small ones, the things beaten in the strangling surf, the bird, singing, which flies and falls and is not seen again.... I love the lost ones, the failures of the world." And he said to itself, I must go back and find the star thrower.

As he returned down the beach, far ahead in the "rain swept morning", he saw the star thrower still flinging stars beneath the rainbow. Eiseley joined the man, picked up a still-living star and spun it himself far into the waves.

"Call me another thrower," was all he said to the man. And Eiseley picked up another and flung it into the sea, and another. "Perhaps", he thought, "far out on the rim of space a genuine star was...being seized and flung." He could feel the movement of his body in the repetition of the throwing. It felt good. "It was like sowing—the sowing of life."

He walked on, then looked back, and saw the star thrower stoop and fling once more. And Eiseley picked up a star and flung and flung again, sowing life against all the death in world. A sower, sowing life. Flinging life like a fool in love with the world.

And as he flung he felt as though he and the man were casting stars on some infinite beach, “beside”, he ends the essay, “a unknown hurler of suns.”

II

When I read that essay years ago, all I could think of was Jesus’ ministry. God sent into our history of tooth and claw and endless human struggle, a star thrower! Born in a small town in a tiny occupied country, his people at first thought him a fool, flinging stars into the sea, sowing life in the face of so much death.

Zechariah, John the Baptist’s father, saw it all at John’s birth. The Holy Spirit filled him and he prophesied:

All this is from the kindness of our God,
 he, the dayspring shall visit us in his mercy
 to shine on those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death,
 to guide our feet into the way of peace. (Luke 1: 78-9)

Jesus the Star Thrower came and he said, “I DO love the world. I love every small one, every bird that sings and flies and falls. I love every creature great and small, and every human child, star of God, washed on life’s shore.”

He went to the synagogue in his hometown Nazareth, unfurled the Hebrew scriptures and read:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me
because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor,
to proclaim release to captives and recovery of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed.

And he saw a man with an unclean spirit and said to the spirit: “Be silent and be gone!” And the spirit came out of the man. Liberty! And he spun him back into life and said, “Live!”

And he saw Simon’s mother-in-law with a high fever, and he rebuked the fever, and immediately it left. Live!

And he went by the Sea of Galilee and saw two men washing their nets and he said, “Put your nets out into the deep and let them down for a catch.” And they protested. Simon said, “But we’ve been at it all night and caught nothing! But at your word I will.” They did and their nets were full to the breaking. And Jesus said, “Do not be afraid of this miracle; this is a sign of the God’s kingdom. It is

breaking upon us now. From now on you will be catching men, saving women and men. Sowing life!”

And a man came to Jesus full of leprosy, and when he saw Jesus he fell on his feet and said, “Lord, if you *want*, you can make me clean.” And Jesus touched this man so long untouched, and said “I do want. Be clean!” Live!

And four men came carrying their crippled friend to Jesus on a pallet, and Jesus said, “Your sins are forgiven,” then he said, “Take up your pallet and walk!” And he flung another star into the sea and said, “Live!

And he went to a tax collector’s office. His name was Levi. And he said, “Your job is your death, come follow me. And live!” And the man left everything, rose and followed.

And Levi threw a party for Jesus and invited to the feast other tax collectors and other sinners and outcasts. And the Pharisees and scribes looking on—they are always looking on— grumbled and said, “Why do you eat and drink with such!” “With such!”, they said!

And Jesus said, “Those who are well need no physician. I have not come to make the righteous more righteous and the respectable more respectable, but by God’s kindness to call sinners to repentance and to life!” And he spun another star into the sea.

And he saw a man with a withered hand. It was the sabbath. Jesus knew he had an audience waiting to see if he'd break a sabbath law and heal on that holy day. And he said to the spectators, "What is the Lord's Sabbath for, but to do good.?! Would the Lord of the Universe save life or destroy it on his Sabbath of joy and rest?" So he turned to the man and said, "Stretch out your hand!" And the man stretched out his hand, and God healed the man's hand on God's own Sabbath.

And the Star Thrower called others to cast with him. Twelve in all. Brothers Simon and Andrew, brothers James and John, Phillip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, another James, Simon the Zealot, Thaddeus and Judas, yes Judas too! "Follow me and let's sow life!", he said, and they did.

And he taught us unto the way of peace. A crowd gathered and he said, "Love your enemy, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who harm you, for God is kind to the ungrateful and selfish." (Perhaps then we all have a chance!) "Give to everyone who begs from you, for God is merciful to all." Then he closed, "Judge not and you will not be judged. Forgive and you will be forgiven."

The way of peace. Foolish to the world of tooth and claw and the survival of the fittest, but the wisdom of God to all who are being saved.

And he healed a Roman centurion's son, and he raised to life the son of the widow of Nain. "Live!", he cried, two more stars hurled into the sea!

And he had a dinner with a Pharisee— all religions have the type—and while they were eating, a woman described as a "woman of the city", broke into the company of men carrying a box of perfumed ointment. As she reached Jesus tears were already falling, tears which wet his feet, and she let down her hair and wiped his feet with her hair and anointed them with her perfume.

This sent the Pharisee host into a twit, and he grumbled at the woman's outlandish behavior. But Jesus said, "Those who are forgiven much, love much." And he looked at her and said the words she'd already heard, words which had brought her there and brought her tears, words that had let down her hair and poured perfume on his feet, words which were life to her. "Your sins are forgiven", was what he said.

And he went through the cities and villages and the twelve were with him, and also some women, women given life now sowing life, women healed of evil spirits and disease: Mary Magdalene, healed of seven demons, and Joanna, wife of Herod's steward—that must have been some story—and Suzanna, and "many others" who provided for Jesus and joined his mission of life.

And all the above is just a summary of four chapters of one gospel, Luke, a thimble full of God's ocean of love and light.

III

Who was this man spinning stars back into life? This single, solitary man on one small beach and for three short years taught and healed and forgave and lived a kindness that brought people life? Was he a fool, sowing life against so much death in the world?

Was his mercy a fool's gesture in the face of history's chaos and man's inhumanity to man? Was his an ineffectual, mutant love standing on the shores of evolution's faceless sea? Or, was it God's New Thing redeeming our laws and ways? A sign, like a rainbow, of the sureness of God's love and of its final triumph? I think that's it! God's new thing, the New Creation born.

Has the Star Thrower found you cast upon the shore and spun you back into the waves to live?

He comes to those walking in the shadow of death and says as he lifts them from the sand, "Live!"

He says to those bearing life's crushing load, wondering if they can make it, "I am with you. Live!"

And he says to the poor in spirit, disheartened by their lives and the life of the world, "Yours is the kingdom of God, Live!"

And he comes to the hungry and houseless, to those outcast by one hatred or another, to the sick, to the neuro-divergent and non-typical, and to those tempted by despair and says, “Live!”

And he comes to you and hands you a star and says, “*You are a thrower too!*”

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1. Loren Eiseley, “The Star Thrower” *The Star Thrower* (New York: A Harvest Book, 1978) 169-185.