

This morning, I continue to think of a book that was published in the year 2000 entitled “Bowling Alone” by Robert Putnam. The conceit of the book is that as modern technology has increased people’s ability to isolate and engage with their interests individually, people have less in-person interaction and thus less investment in the social network that undergirds our society.

In effect, to give an example, there was a time when if you wanted to bowl, you learned from somebody in a league which you joined and you continued to play in that league. As a result, you met people and made friends. Nowadays, the option exists such that you could limit your interaction with other bowlers as much as you wanted. You can learn more about bowling online through youtube or reddit and you can go bowling alone.

So why the heck am I bringing this book up? It’s because Jesus talks of himself not as Lord, or the Son of Man, not the King of Kings... but as friend. And while those former regal titles are used with God and Jesus pretty regularly, I’m glad Jesus brings up his being friends with his disciples because this is something that shows up in other places of scripture. In Isaiah God tells the prophet of his friendship with Abraham as well as in 2 Chronicles and in the letter of James. Friendship is important to God and its important to us.

And I bring it up because it can be hard to make a new friend these days.

The bowling alone experience is something I’ve absolutely lived out, and I suspect my experience is not strange. About 8 years ago, I decided that I wanted to learn how to fish. I had just been dumped, so I suppose this story can fit in the ex-girlfriend chronicles, but I was hurting and I felt like taking up this hobby would be good for me.

And It was. But let me tell you. I watched so many fishing tutorials on youtube and I bought so much junk that I ultimately did not need, and it was because I was too scared of looking stupid that I did not join a new fishers group at the local bait shop. Or even ask for help from others.

Well when I started fishing, I didn't catch next to anything. And one day in the fall I went to a new fishing spot on the south side, at the 87<sup>th</sup> street slip. It's a place you can fish for perch, I think probably a little bit less than legally given all the signs that were up, but everybody online said it was the place to go. It's a huge canyon of water that juts out of lake Michigan and is where huge freight boats would be worked on. Well I went out there and started to fish alone. And I was out there for a couple of hours while other fishermen came on by too. And there was this old, rickety, kinda grungy looking guy. Well I think by luck I accidentally hooked a little perch when I was reeling in for another cast. I was thrilled that I got this little guppy. And that old man who had showed up, he came up to me. And he asked me, not knowing me from Adam, "hey you gonna keep that?" I said no, and he asked if he could keep it and I gave it to him.

And I was so nervous about how stupid I must have looked. How I must have been using the wrong equipment, must have looked foolish with my casting. All of my fears of encountering another person who might judge me cropped up. Well the man said thank you and stepped back to his spot. And I thought "thank heavens I can keep messing this up on my own." That is, until he came back. And he stuck his hand out, and in it was a hunk of chopped up, fresh perch. The dude had gone to his spot and hacked this fish I'd caught up and he came back and said, "put this on your hook and drop it straight off the side."

And I did. And within seconds, I had a perch on the line. He gave me another bit of fish and I caught another one. And another. And so on. And we began laughing as he told me stories of growing up on that side of town, about how there was an old ford at the bottom of the slip, of a perch he caught that was as big as a lake trout and of how to ice fish at this spot (incidentally, it was to find "an old cinderblock, a big rock, or an old tv" and throw it into the ice to make a hole).

Wasn't the first time I saw him either. I'd see him from time to time whenever I'd go down to fish.

And I guess the point is he was my friend, despite how hard I tried not to make a friend in the way I learned how to fish. And he became my friend because he gave me love in the form of a chopped up stanky bit of lake perch.

I've said it before, but I think one of the bravest things I see on Sunday is when new people walk through those doors. Trying out a new church is scary and vulnerable. You never know what sort of whackadoo thing you're going to hear or if you'll be welcomed. You have all been that person at some point or another. But if you've been at St. Christopher's for a bit, even just a few months, I hope you feel like you've got friends here. And I hope you try to be vulnerable in other places too, that you go to a neighborhood block party, that you sign up for hearthsides, that you go up to someone you've never met at St. C.'s Café today. You may not get stinky fish from the folks you meet here (that's a suspicion, I suspect anything's possible) but I bet you can find real estate advice when you're scared of buying a new home, or you'll learn a new recipe if you talk to someone about cooking. I know you'll at the very least yet most importantly find a kind word and an open ear.

Christ became vulnerable with each of his disciples whom he called friends. Give that vulnerability a shot, even if you may feel stupid doing it. Chances are better than not you'll find a friend. Amen.