

Chapter Seven

The Conclusion of this Matter

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil. (Eccl 12:13–14)

1.

Along the coast of Oregon, it rained most every day all winter long. We joked about it raining forty days in a row and we being still there, wet, cold, but along the river with rod in hand—and no bow in the sky. There wasn't enough sun for a rainbow to be seen.

The work of this memoir was done in chapter six: in this chapter I can rest while remembering I said as a high school senior that I would leave the Coast and never return ... I did leave, but I was back two years later, living along the Siletz River, fishing mostly its upper reaches for summer and winter steelhead.

I left the night of my high school graduation in 1963, returned in 1965, and didn't migrate North until 1974. For almost a decade I would pass by Salmon River on my way to Portland; I would see where I fished as a kid; and I would think about again wetting a line in the holes of my youth, knowing though that the Siletz offered better fishing.

It is, however, in the holes of my youth where memories lay still, waiting to be recalled if needed.

As a senior in high school, I had applied to University of Alaska Fairbanks, and I was accepted, but without a full-ride scholarship. I would have to pay \$560 for room and board, and I didn't have that kind of money. Eastern Oregon offered me a full-ride, and Willamette University offered me an honors scholarship and loan that covered everything ... my school of choice was Alaska, but UAF Admissions said not to expect getting a job; that the campus was then five miles out of Fairbanks. So I put going to Alaska on a backburner and took the scholarship to Willamette, where I really didn't fit-in.

Since starting school as the biggest kid in 1st grade, then doing 6th, 7th, and 8th grades in one year and starting high school when twelve, I hadn't fit-in, but I was less a loner than the *outsider*. Mom had emphasized that she was, and we were direct descendants of John Howland of *Mayflower* infamy. Dad's family came from the first German immigrants to Pennsylvania, Mennonites who came for religious freedom. And with 17th-Century ancestry on both sides, plus some Native American blood on both sides, I had drummed into me that we were

different, something I resented greatly at the time but also something I could not escape considering my size for my age. I could not be like others even if I wanted, and I really didn't want to be like everyone else.

I don't know how many "crush-proof" packs of Marlboros I crushed while rolled up in t-shirt sleeves, ala James Dean. Yes, there were a number of fellows who wanted to take a swing at me, but didn't because I was a little too eager to fight—my sister claims I was a bully, but that isn't true for I was usually defending a little kid when she saw me intervene in a situation, and I did intervene when a little kid was getting pushed around. I never felt I had a choice whether I should or shouldn't ... I set myself apart from others; I didn't try to get along. What peers did or thought wasn't particularly interesting. Of far more interest was catching another fish, feeling the power of the fish through the rod, a life and death struggle—I didn't release many fish, so the struggle was life or death, with me having the advantage because if I did land this fish, there was always macaroni or pancakes and cinnamon sugar.

Catching fish might not have been necessary for our survival, but not catching fish never entered my thoughts.

I arrived in Kenai on a humpy year: the Kenai River was filled with pink salmon. From along the Kenai's banks in the Soldotna area, it was hard to make a cast without hooking, fair or foul, a salmon past its prime but still scrappy. I was used to catching bright or at least fairly bright fish, so the water-marked humpies didn't hold much appeal. Nevertheless, I found myself getting caught up in catching them: they were fun to play with.

After seeing the Pipeline boom become the post-Pipeline bust, I sold my shop in 1979, bought a 29 foot double-ender, a Bartender, designed by George Calkins, whose shop on D-River I passed every day on my way to high school, and I set sail for Kodiak, arriving in town with enough fish to buy fuel and groceries so I could head back out fishing ... in the quiet bays of Afognak Island I fished halibut without another boat in sight. For seven weeks, I made \$1,700 a day for every day I fished as I healed financially from the beating I took from Kenai's busted economy.

The Pacific quota for halibut was caught by the third week of July. I then had no other business but fishing, so I continued west, going out to Dutch Harbor, where the Bering Sea remained open for halibut.

I fished as weather permitted through August and into September before the season closed for halibut—and for me, fishing a longline differed little from plunking for Chinook on the Salmon River. Only I was fishing 1,800 hooks and three miles of line instead of one hook and one rod.

The ex-vessel price for halibut dropped from \$2.07 a pound in 1979 to 80 cents a pound in 1980. I fished 1980, but didn't make enough to continue—I returned to repairing chainsaws, working for Sutliffe's True Value Hardware in Kodiak. I did, however, fish the six day opening of the 1983 halibut season, all of the open season that there was for the year.

While living in Kodiak, I fished the Buskin River and other smaller rivers from early spring to late fall. Fishing was more than either harvesting food or purely

sport: it became the activity around which the day was organized just as explicating Scripture is now that activity. It is as if those years spent fishing were preparation of the solitude of Scripture.

For a few years, I paid the rent writing fishing articles for outdoor magazines; for more years I have written about fishing for men.

As a sport, angling has turned to catch-and-release as fish, especially large fish, have become too valuable to be only caught once ... can men be caught more than once? Not really. For the person who has received a second breath of life has placed before the person life or death, with the requirement to choose one or the other. Not to choose life, though, is to choose death. And once a person chooses death, Christ sculpts the person into a vessel of wrath, endured for a season, but slated for destruction "in order to make known the riches of his [Christ's] glory for vessels of mercy" (Rom 9:23).

Silver Christendom shines like a spoon, like a *Little Cleo wiggly-lure*, bouncing along the bottom of a drift, its treble hooks hungry and seldom empty ... I have never fished a spoon that worked as well as the original Little Cleo, and I have taken a literal ton of silvers on a Hot-Rod drifted straight toward me.

The Sabbath isn't a day for me to fish for salmon or steelhead, but for men. I look to hook whoever will bite. And in some ways this has been the case since I fished the Salmon River where as a kid among older men I was the *outsider*.

Maybe I have been an *outsider* my entire life:

SNAGGING EELS

Just another white kid
to the old man with pole poised
over the white water—
narrow & twisting
Salmon River roared
through the chute foaming white
like a lamprey heavy with spawn—
eels used to leap out of the boil
like salmon, sometimes
clinging to slippery rocks, sometimes
wiggling over the top as men scale walls.
With a hook lashed to a pole, I joined
Indians snagging eels;
I knew their eldest daughter—
she wouldn't look at me, wouldn't speak
till I stuck an eel on my arm.
Her sisters screamed, tried to pull it off,
but she said, *Leave it alone,*
eels turn loose when they feel warm
blood, and she held it till it did,
then tossed it in their half-full washtub

and offered me smoked eel,
greasy in waxpaper.
I couldn't eat it; it wasn't clean.

I don't remember the girl's name—the eels were snagged behind Rapid Inn, and while I wasn't then keeping the Sabbath, I had already quit eating those meats that were "common" to humankind, given to the descendants of Noah as food (Gen 9:3). It is by not eating what is common or unclean that a person confirms that he or she will be holy as God is holy (*cf.* 1 Pet 1:15–16; Lev 11:44), for it isn't the world that is holy but the one who would walk as the Lord walked.

The Baptist will go to the story of Noah as proof that all meats are to be food for humankind, and all that the Baptist proves is that he or she remains a part of this world, a functioning cog in an economic and social system that collapses from rebellion within itself.

I gave a fair-sized octopus to a Chinese woman when I was fishing out of Dutch—she wanted to show me her gratitude by cooking some of it for me, but I declined the offer as well as the offered friendship ... not much had changed between when I was a junior in high school and snagging eels and when I was in my early 30s and alone in Dutch Harbor. The separation that came with not eating what is common could be concealed when working with other men, but it couldn't be concealed when food was shared. I declined the offer of cookies made with lard; I declined sampling a bear I killed and butchered, then traded pound for pound for beef. When I was at Dutch in 1980, friends flew in a whole pig for a luau—that night I hiked across the bridge to Stormy's where I ordered a pizza. And though I caught many crabs in Yaquina Bay, then again when I was at Dutch, I have to take others' word that processed pollock or home-canned halibut taste like crab meat.

Did God give to the descendants of Noah all meat for food? Yes, He did. But then God made a separation of one man from the rest of humankind, the separation based upon the faith of the man Abraham. And it is this separation that will eventually see the Torah placed within the person who voluntarily chooses to be holy as God is holy.

I write mostly about catching salmon and steelhead, fish with fins and scales, glamorous fish, shinier than the jewelry of trophy wives ... in 1996, when attending Fall Feast services in Vail, Colorado, a minister who had formerly been in Alaska came up to me after theological changes had been made by the fellowship I had attended for more than two decades. The minister said, "Isn't it nice that we don't have to be *special* any more." I didn't answer the minister, for the entire essence of being called as one of the firstfruits was that we were special, not because of anything we had done but because we had received a second breath of life as a son of God born out of season, a son under obligation to ripen fruit in spiritual darkness.

Fruit doesn't ripen well in shade, and doesn't ripen at all in darkness; yet disciples, like the fig tree Jesus asked for fruit when it wasn't the season for figs, are to bear and are to ripen fruit when it isn't the season for fruit—and much of

this fruit will not really be edible. Nevertheless, that is the task placed before every disciple when a second breath of life is received.

Through fishing I remain connect to the strings of this world:

FORMLINE—

1.

Asked if all I carved were fish
I answered a simple no
& showed a double otter
a crouching bear
to the new minister
who understands fish
as Christian symbols—
but I'm not comfortable
sculpting icons
that might be read as Dagon—

reasons I carve mostly halibut
are simple: I like the form
the sense of twisting power
I bring
to a common wood bowl—

I use smooth flowing sides
to tell formline stories
in circles of cycles—

but my art is mainly fish
because I fished
three seasons
laying & picking
three miles of longline
each tide change
so through art
I remain connected
to halibut even now
when I no longer have gaff
in hand.

2.

With adze & crooked knife
I reduce trees to figured bowls
sometimes even capturing life
so if one of my sculptures spoke

simple words, naming other works
of my hand, I'd be pleased
would feel pride
you would too

but if my creation pouted & plotted
& proved itself generally disagreeable
I'd probably split it into kindling
certainly would've when younger
but with some maturing
I might listen in amusement
knowing whenever I wished
I could end its contentiousness
so here across unbridgeable dimensions
I flounder like one of my fish
for even simple words
to stutter into stories
for those who would lift the sky.

Judaism holds that there are seven laws of Noah (referred to as the *Noahide Laws*) that are moral imperatives serving as binding laws for all of humankind, these laws being a prohibition of idolatry, of murder, of theft, of sexual immorality, of blasphemy, of eating what is common, plus the requirement to have just laws. Keeping these seven laws constitute the work of the law, or loving one's neighbor, what the Apostle Paul contends is required of every person who is without the law if they are to enter heaven (Rom 2:12–16).

Judaism finds 613 commandments in the Torah—these 613 can be reduced to love God and love neighbor, but to love God and neighbor doesn't erase any of the 613, despite what silver Christendom has preached about faith for almost two millennia ... fishing is a little like riding a bike. Casting, mending line, setting a hook are acquired reflex skills, as is having love for God and neighbor. If a person has to think about setting a hook, or about keeping the commandments, then the person will not and indeed cannot do either. It is only when the commandments are within the person, causing the person to love God and neighbor without conscious thought that the commandments can be kept. And this means that God has to place the Torah within the person, the primary attribute of the New Covenant.

Judaism ultimately fails because of the attention it pays to minutia. Christianity as the world knows the religion fails because of its disbelief. And Sabbatarian Christendom fails for its absence of love. It is no wonder that the Father will deliver Israel, all of Israel, natural and spiritual, into the hand of the man of perdition once the seven endtime years of tribulation begin, with these years being harder on Israel than the Holocaust was.

Every deed done will be known—and most of us would just as soon have some of these deeds washed away by a flooding stream of consciousness that cannot be fished.

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