THE STRAIT TIMES

from Ridge to Reef to Ridge of the Somosomo Strait

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JESUS, WE HAVE A FISHING PROBLEM

Some two thousand years ago, a group of fishermen had a miserable night. Then along came Jesus, who suggested they cast their nets again, deeper.

BY MARINE STEWARDSHIP DESK | REPORTING FROM NAGARA

They did. And what a catch! So many fish the nets began to break. Another boat was called to help. Both boats were so full they nearly sank.

A miracle!

Today we might call it a very successful fishing expedition. Or perhaps an incident requiring investigation. It rather depends on what we think fishing is for.

Canadians have some familiarity with that question. They have fished the Grand Banks of Newfoundland for centuries. Then, in 1992, the northern cod fishery collapsed so badly that the government declared a moratorium.

Thousands of livelihoods disappeared. The cod, once seemingly inexhaustible, had proved otherwise. The once plentiful, has still not recovered.

Canadians were hardly the first to discover that a sea full of fish is not necessarily a sea that will remain full of fish. Roman writers like Juvenal wrote fishing problems in the 2nd century CE.

We've made extraordinary progress since those fishermen on the Sea of Galilee.

We have sonar to locate, radar to navigate, satellites to guide, longlines stretching for kilometres, enormous nets and vessels that can haul, process and freeze their catches without returning to shore.

Modern miracles, every one.

We have become exceptionally good at catching fish. So good that one wonders whether some of what we now call fishing might better be called extraction.

But here's the troublesome bit. When does a full net become a troubled net?

When is enough, enough?

And as we take, what do we leave behind?

Nature is rather good at replacing fish. Given the opportunity, fish make more fish. But they need somewhere to live, something to eat, and enough of their own kind to keep the business going.

Which brings us to an old proverb.

Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day.

Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.



Splendid advice. Except it assumes there will always be fish.

Perhaps after two thousand years of improving our ability to catch them, we could add a third line.

Teach him about fish, and there might still be fish for a lifetime.

Since Jesus we have been overfishing. Just taken a while to catch up with us.

I doubt Jesus would object. He wanted them to put down their nets and fish for men.

Though he might suggest we spend a little less time admiring our nets and a little more time wondering about what's supporting them.

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Serving Vanua Levu, Taveuni, and the Waters of the Somosomo Strait

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