

May 1, 2022

Let us pray. Open our eyes that we may see. Open our hearts that we may feel your Spirit stirring. Open our ears to hearing of your Word, read and proclaimed. Amen.

Our scripture for this morning comes from the Gospel of John, chapter 21, verses 1 through 19. Listen now for the word of the lord.

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. 2 Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. 3 Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. 4 Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." 6 He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. 7 That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. 8 But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off. 9 When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. 10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." 11 So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. 14 This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. 15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." 16 A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." 17 He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. 18 Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." 19 (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

I've never really cared for fishing. I only went once, maybe twice, as a kid, and for whatever reason it really didn't click. My short attention span probably didn't help matters.

Now, when I say I went fishing - I should be clear that I mean I was fishing from a dock on a lake with just a fishing pole - really nothing extreme. And it's probably why I find the fishing stories so intriguing in the gospels.

Because unlike a casual, recreational, fishing experience, to go fishing out on the sea in Jesus' time would have been hard labor - trying to fill their nets on the open waters with fish and then bring the full nets aboard and sail back to shore - it was no small feat.

Our scripture for today begins with Simon Peter saying he is going fishing. This story follows our scripture from last week, where the resurrected Christ showed himself to Thomas - and at this point has shown himself to all the disciples and Mary Magdalene and it's been a week since his resurrection.

And in John's gospel, the last time Peter spoke before saying "I am going fishing" was when he denied Christ three times before Christ was crucified.

A lot has happened since then. And Simon Peter has been part of it - he ran to see the empty tomb for himself and saw it but went back home and said nothing.

We don't hear his perspective when Christ appears to the disciples, and then when Christ appears to Thomas - Peter is there but we don't get a glimpse into his mind. We don't know what he's thinking, how he's reacting. Was he happy? Afraid? Probably both.

But we do know he, seemingly out of nowhere, declares he's going to go fishing in the night. And some disciples join him.

I wonder why he suddenly wanted to go fishing? Was it all just too overwhelming - watching your Lord die and then see him again - realizing you didn't stick with him when it counted - even though you swore you would? Was it all too overwhelming that he just needed to get out of there?

While John never states so explicitly, Simon Peter was likely a fisherman - the other gospels label him as such. Thus as he escapes in the night to go fishing. He's returning to the comfort of the familiar.

I wonder if this familiar allowed him to think in a place he felt safe? Or maybe the physical labor of fishing calmed his mind so that he could try to process it all? I wonder if it was a clear night? Or a quiet night?

Were there other boats out? Did Peter get lost in his thoughts as the hours turned to daybreak?

I wonder, because whatever happened that night, something seemed to click.

The day breaks and they have caught nothing - but there Jesus is, on the shore - waiting for them with a meal already prepared.

And when Simon Peter hears it's the Lord, when he hears that Jesus is there on the shore - he doesn't hesitate - he dives into the sea just to get to Christ a little faster.

Even those precious extra seconds he gets with his Lord matter to him now.

The detail that he was naked and puts his clothes back on references back to Genesis and the shame Adam and Eve had when they realized they were naked.

So drastic, so transformative, was this night for Peter that even his shame does not stop him from moving towards the one he loves. He trades shame for joy.

In years past, I haven't gravitated much towards the Easter season and the stories of the resurrected Christ. It can be, I think, kind of an awkward time in the church year.

We are coming off the high of Easter Sunday, of the resurrection, and then when we try to get back to normal, we're told to just sit in resurrection, in these few stories of Christ in between - not on his way to the cross - but not yet ascended into heaven - we have to sit with a resurrected Christ here on Earth - in a way that we probably wouldn't if it wasn't part of the church calendar. Why? Why do we need these post resurrection stories?

Specifically this story - for everyone in this story has already seen the risen Christ. No one is meeting him for the first time. If anything, this story can be disappointing because even here the disciples still do not recognize the risen Lord - the only one to do so is his beloved disciple.

Some say it's here so Simon Peter can be reconciled back to Christ and I think that is true.

Where before Peter denied Christ three times, here he declares his love for Christ three times and then Christ gives him his calling: to feed his sheep.

But I think it's a bit more than that. I think these resurrection stories are for us - those of us who come after Christ's earthly life who cannot see in the flesh.

They show us how to live in a world in between - a world where the resurrected Christ is alive each and every day - but also a world where God's kingdom here on earth is not yet fully realized. A world in between.

And in a world in between - we like to look forward, to look back, to look for a way out.

One moment we are the beloved disciple who instantly recognizes Christ in the here and now, the next we are Peter going fishing.

But lucky for us - no matter which one we are or any in between - Christ still meets us where we are with abundance. No matter if we return to the ordinary -

through resurrection even the ordinary is no more. Jesus comes to us, to serve us, to nourish us. Resurrection is abundance. They caught 153 fish that night. Abundance.

A similar story to this one is found in the Gospel of Luke. When Christ first calls his disciples, they were fishing but caught nothing. But Christ tells them to cast their nets into the deep waters and then they catch so much fish the net begins to break.

But here in John's gospel the story is after the Resurrection. The beauty of this story happening after Christ resurrection is that it serves as a reminder to us - that Christ's miracles, his signs, his abundant generosity, his grace and forgiveness - they are not a thing of the past - this post resurrection story reminds us that Christ continues to bless us and feed us with abundant generosity here and now. In the in-between.

And in doing so we are invited, we are called to follow Christ just like Simon Peter - to participate in his work, to feed his sheep.

Probably my favorite thing I learned in undergrad was the theological concept of *Creatio Continua* - or in English, continuous creation. It's the concept that creation, our world, is not stagnant.

That even after the 7 days God continues to create - and for us, being made in the image of God means we get to participate in that creation.

We create beneath, but alongside God as co-creators - using the gifts God gave us to help create God's kingdom here on Earth. And I think the post resurrection stories show us how. How to participate in God's continuous creation.

From the tolls of our labour, Christ gives us abundance - abundant fish to go out and feed his sheep. For when we feed Christ's sheep - we feed Christ. When we love his sheep, we love Christ. When we tend his sheep - we participate with Christ in creating, in bringing God's kingdom here on earth.

And we can do so because a resurrected Christ - brought back from the grips of death - is alive and always with us here on earth.

But in this world, a world in between - a world filled with grace and love but also cruelty and hate - it is sometimes hard to find Christ. But again, the resurrection stories show us how.

Even when, like Mary Magdalene, we mistake him for a gardener, he calls us by name. Even when, like the disciples, we hide in a locked room out of fear, Christ comes to us there in our fear. And even when, like Thomas, we do not believe the testimony of our friends, Christ comes to us in our doubt. And even when, like Peter, our betrayal overwhelms us and we run back to the familiar, Christ meets us there, and still produces abundance.

Perhaps the silence of Peter from the time he denied Christ to when he declares he is going fishing - perhaps his silence allows us to step in his place.

We, all who so often deny Christ, can step into his shoes and wonder, to feel and witness it all - the crucifixion, the empty tomb, the resurrection.

And then maybe his silence leads us to that boat. And we get to wonder for ourselves what changed that night that made him ready to jump into the water and trade his shame for Joy.

Again, I'm not one for much fishing. But when I'm overwhelmed I turn back to the familiar. Just like Peter. I think all of us do. So, what do we need on the night on the boat? Or when do we need a night on that boat to come back to Christ? A night in the familiar.

Peter's silence allows us that space. And assures us that Christ will meet us even there and still produce abundance through us.

Because sitting with the resurrected Christ here in a world in between gives us steadfast faith that the gospel is not only a thing of the past or a thing of the future. The gospel is right here and now.

So let us follow him, co-create with him, and bring God's kingdom here on earth.

Thanks be to God. Amen.