

May 5, 2019 Third Sunday of Easter
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Peace Lutheran Church – Austin, Texas

GOSPEL

John 21:1-19

The holy gospel according to Saint John, the twenty-first chapter.

Glory to you, O Lord.

¹After [he appeared to his followers in Jerusalem,] Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. ²Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. ³Simon 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.

⁴Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵Jesus said to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” They answered him, “No.” ⁶He 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. ⁷That 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. ⁸But 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.

⁹When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. ¹⁰Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” ¹¹So 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. ¹²Jesus 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. ¹³Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

¹⁵When 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.” ¹⁶A 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.” ¹⁷He 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. ¹⁸Very 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 gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

We are gathered again today...the light of the resurrection still burning...It is still Easter. We are still learning again what it might mean for Christ to return to us alive, even though he had died. The disciples are still learning it, too.

Today, seven of the eleven who Jesus had met in the room where they were locked away in fear, have gone back to what they know...Peter went back out to a boat on the Sea of Tiberias...and they are doing what they know how to do. They are fishing. Not sure why, exactly...Maybe they are caught between their past and their future. Maybe they thought they could clear their minds. They literally do not know the way forward from here. So they're doing whatever they can think to do. First a locked room in the fearful aftermath of the worst day of their lives...now back to their boats...

Remember that Jesus had appeared twice in that locked room. Had said “Peace be with you,” and told them that what “Peace be with you” really means is “Get out of here. Go!” They were being sent out, he said, just like Jesus had been sent out. They weren't supposed to stay locked away.

And they do leave the room eventually...but today...they still don't seem to have grasped what Jesus really meant...because they are just fishing.

And so Jesus comes to meet them where they are...again...even though it's arguably the wrong place...again...

And he gives them a new direction...again...

He calls them to the shore and reorients the world...especially for Peter. Oh Peter...master of melodrama...and fickle, foolish friend.

The last charcoal fire where we stood with Peter, he was denying knowing Jesus...who was about to be executed. He was deserting his friend denial by denial. Skulking away like the coward he was. I wonder if his mind wandered as he stared into the charcoal fire on the bank of the sea that morning...back to that awful night...to the tangle in his stomach pulled again into the emotional abyss of knowing how badly he had messed up...how much he had hurt someone he loved.

But...Jesus draws him out of that place...away from the trap of that shame...showing Peter slowly...by degrees...that he can still claim his love for Jesus and find his purpose there. Three times he asks the denier if he loves him. Three time he insists “yes,” of course. And Jesus charges him to tend and feed his flock. Perhaps by the third time Peter is beginning to believe he can actually do it.

Sometimes, I wonder if everyone else thought it was fair, though, that Peter still got handed the shepherd’s staff to tend the flock of the friend he abandoned. Or maybe the disciples were far less petty than I am...maybe everything seemed right with the world.

But I do wonder...just like I wonder about Ananias (in Acts)...who knew full and terrifyingly well who Saul was before the Lord sent him to heal him and give him the new mission of serving God and proclaiming the good news of Jesus. Before Saul became Paul, he looked like the last person who could deserve God’s call.

But that’s the thing...it’s never been about deserving anything. Before we could do anything to earn it...or anything to no longer deserve it...we were made children of God. And God keeps calling unlikely, failing, fragile people to lead...to love...to tend the flock of God.

And when we see the calls placed onto the lives of others, it might be tempting to sit in the place of an Ananias or a Mary Magdalene and say...hold on...I never left...why do *they* get that? These stories transport me right back to the elder brother skulking outside refusing to go to the party when his brother returns home after squandering his father’s wealth.

But, if we ever feel like the faithful ones...like the older brother, or Ananias, or Mary...we are just as likely to also be the one who no one would expect could or should be given the work of the kin-dom. We are probably out in that aimless fishing boat, too.

We have also been stuck between our past and our future. We have bolted the door and hunkered down...afraid...We have gone back to what we know...even when we know it isn’t right anymore...Sometimes we have even gone as far as to deny the very heart of what we know is true...And at our worst we may have harmed others who were in the way of our self-interest.

No matter what shame or failure holds us captive today...we are not alone...and Jesus isn’t going to leave us alone.

Individually...as a congregation...and as a whole church...this sense of fearful uncertainty about the future feels so present. We live in uncertain times. Especially the church is

changing so much many of us might wonder (rightly) whether it is going to survive in any form we will recognize for long. And, you know what. The answer isn't clear. Christ's church in a few decades might be nearly unrecognizable to us. Like our Lord on the lakeshore...or on the Emmaus road.

It might be as unrecognizable as the Risen Christ. But it won't be dead. It might die. But it won't be dead. And when bread is broken and shared...we will see Jesus.

The church is being called out to feed and tend the flock...even when we have been like the disciples...afraid...stuck...even having denied our relationship to the one who gives us life. And Jesus is showing us a way forward...Do you love me? Feed my sheep. We ground ourselves in love...and then we live out that love. Everything else is truly up for grabs.

It's so simple...and so scary. But it is where Jesus is pointing us. And...as sure as he's not left us alone yet...he never will.

He'll bring us all the way back to the beginning...no matter how many times we need him to. No matter how many twists and turns...he'll come find us where we are...and wave from the shore...and say, "Follow me." And the adventure will begin again.

Amen.