

Call to Worship

Here we gather beside the fire of love, lit by the risen Christ.

Here we wait for the food of life to share with each other and with those who wait with longing.

It will come to us in the Word and in every truth that we hear today.

We come to you now, Jesus Christ, for we wait in hope and faith.

Prayer of Invocation

Jesus, though the celebration of Easter Day is past, the lilies fading and the alleluias dying away, the reality of your presence with us is ongoing joy and wonder. We rejoice that because of your love, we and the world are being formed into a new creation of your design. Lord, Open us to all that you would have us be, for you and for others. 'Breakthrough' into our lives and our church with new possibilities. Amen.

The Word

John 21:1-19

Later, Jesus himself appeared again to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. This is how it happened: Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, Zebedee's sons, and two other disciples were together. Simon Peter told them, "I'm going fishing." **They said, "We'll go with you." They set out in a boat, but throughout the night they caught nothing. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples didn't realize it was Jesus.**

Jesus called to them, "Children, have you caught anything to eat?" They answered him, "No." He said, "Cast your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." **So they did, and there were so many fish that they couldn't haul in the net. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It's the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard it was the Lord, he wrapped his coat around himself and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, dragging the net full of fish.**

When they landed, they saw a fire there, with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you've just caught." Simon Peter got up and pulled the net to shore. It was full of large fish, one hundred fifty-three of them. Yet the net hadn't torn, even with so many fish. **Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples could bring themselves to ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread, and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.**

When they finished eating, Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" **Simon replied, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you."**

Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." Jesus asked a second time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Simon replied, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you."

Jesus said to him, "Take care of my sheep." He asked a third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was sad that Jesus asked him a third time, "Do you love me?" He replied, "Lord, you know everything; you know I love you."

Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. I assure you that when you were younger you tied your own belt and walked around wherever you wanted. When you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and another will tie your belt and lead you where you don't want to go." **He said this to show the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. After saying this, Jesus said to Peter, "Follow me."**

Living the Word

One Friday, a few weeks ago, my husband Bob was home to work on Hamblin Farms book work. It is also my time to type the sermon each week. I usually work in silence. He likes music in the back ground and chose a 70's music station. I found myself singing along, and having a difficult time concentrating on what I wanted to write.

I finally gave up, setting aside the sermon to put my feet up and sing along for a while. I even got to my feet at one point and danced some disco with John Travolta to Night Fever. Until Bob rolled his eyes and said that he couldn't believe I remembered the steps after this many years. I'm sure it was a sight to behold...so I sat back down and while singing I actually dozed for a bit, waking to feeling refreshed and ready to get back to the writing.

Sometimes when the pressure is on, we need to take a break to clear our heads before we move forward. For the disciples, who are still living in the trauma and drama of Easter with its denials and dangers, and then death with its mysteries and resurrection, and then a new life again, after this death; they are unsure and afraid and lost and don't know what will come next. And Peter says "*I'm going fishing.*" Take note that Peter seems to be taking the lead, he just can't sit around waiting any longer for whatever is to come next.

For the disciples fishing was more than a recreational sport. When we were first married, Bob would tell me that he had to go fishing to 'feed the family.' Yet now that I go fishing with him we mostly fish to see who can get the biggest and the most. Even so, for the disciples it was their former vocation. It was their family tradition and trade. They really did fish to feed the family, though this time they had no such agenda. *They said, "We'll go with you."*

They set out in a boat, but throughout the night they caught nothing. They surely hadn't forgotten how to fish in the few years they had been touring with Jesus. Was it because they were so distracted that they were just going through the motions without really trying? Could it be that they couldn't escape all that now filled their minds? Or maybe God was about to prove a point...

Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples didn't realize it was Jesus. I imagine that they were not really expecting to find the Risen Lord there on the shore before them first thing in the morning. A new day is dawning for them, a new beginning. The next thing they had been waiting for was launching before them. It was a time to refocus on whatever was to come.

Jesus called to them, "Children, have you caught anything to eat?" I am intrigued that Jesus calls them children...these were grown men, but he is treating them as if they have reverted back in time to their younger years. Could he be trying to help them see that they have to leave the past behind and not be afraid to look into the future?

They answered him, "No." He said, "Cast your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." So they did, and there were so many fish that they couldn't haul in the net. Is there a wrong side of the boat to fish from? I know when we go on our favorite lakes to fish we steer to places where we believe there are more fish than other places... Or is Jesus telling them they are fishing in the wrong waters?

Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It's the Lord!" We are reading from the book of John, many times the author refers to John as 'the disciple whom Jesus loved.' So John is the first to recognize that it is the Lord. But Peter is the first to get to Jesus, as he acts within his impetuous nature by jumping out of the boat and swimming the 100 yards to shore, leaving the other disciples to haul in the fish.

Peter doesn't hesitate as he did in the denials of Christ. He has had time to reflect on those denials. How many times have you wanted to say "if only I could go back and do it all over, I would do it differently." There are

regrets in life, but our God is a God of second chances. Deep down Peter knows that and is eagerly diving in for another chance to prove himself to Christ.

This 'do over' in Christ, for Peter is a reminder to us that Christ's forgiveness is also for us. Shame can shut us down as people, and close us off from growth. Peter breaks free of the shame to be with Christ. John and Peter each respond differently to the knowledge that Jesus is present, they are two different people, who understand and act differently but must work together to accomplish all that God will set before them in the future ministries ahead of them.

When they landed, they saw a fire there, with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you've just caught." Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Jesus came, took the bread, and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish. Jesus is once again showing them by example how to serve. He has made them breakfast and served it to them.

Once again Jesus is alive and present with them. The meal was probably a quiet one, with the disciples waiting for the other shoe to drop, surely there would be punishment for their lack of participation to save him from the cross. You might think that he would have spent this time with more lecture and emphasis on correcting what they had gotten wrong, since his arrest.

There were a number of things he could have pointed out like: Why did you fall asleep when I asked you to pray in the garden with me? Why did you run off after I was arrested? Where were most of you as I hung on the cross? Why didn't you remember what I told you about resurrection? This is the 3rd time I have come to you since the resurrection...Why are you so surprised to see me this morning?

But that isn't how Jesus works. Instead he reminds them of what he was about and who they need to be now for others by giving them another example. He cooks and serves them breakfast. I imagine it was a quiet meal as they sat in awe of this mystery, but also in fear of what Jesus might say to them. Their guilt and shame for their recent actions had to be in the forefront of their thoughts.

Possibly they were experiencing Déjà vu, remembering another time, when they had been fishing at the beginning of their time with Jesus. Luke 5 records it this way: *One day Jesus was standing beside Lake Gennesaret when the crowd pressed in around him to hear God's word. Jesus saw two boats sitting by the lake. The fishermen had gone ashore and were washing their nets.*

Jesus boarded one of the boats, the one that belonged to Simon, then asked him to row out a little distance from the shore. Jesus sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he finished speaking to the crowds, he said to Simon, "Row out farther, into the deep water, and drop your nets for a catch."

Simon replied, "Master, we've worked hard all night and caught nothing. But because you say so, I'll drop the nets." So they dropped the nets and their catch was so huge that their nets were splitting... Peter and those with him were overcome with amazement because of the number of fish they caught. James and John, Zebedee's sons, were Simon's partners and they were amazed too. Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid. From now on, you will be fishing for people." As soon as they brought the boats to the shore, they left everything and followed Jesus.

The message of that day is the message of this day for them as well. It is time to once again drop the nets and really become the fishers of men that Jesus has been training them for. Then Jesus turns to Peter, the one who betrayed him three times and asks him a question three times.

When they finished eating, Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" Simon replied, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you."

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Jesus doesn't shame Peter for his three denials before the cross, but instead gives him three opportunities to wipe the slate clean and then directs the future for Peter: "*Feed my lambs, Care for my sheep, Feed my sheep. Follow me.*"

Did you notice that Jesus is calling him Simon son of John? Just as he was calling them children, he has reverted to Peter's 'younger name.' The name Jesus had changed near the beginning of their ministry together. The new name, Peter, meant the rock, and Jesus had said that he would build his church upon that rock. But that couldn't happen if they were going to forget all they had learned and seen over the last three years with Jesus, by reverting to fishermen seeking fish.

It is all grace! Jesus handles the whole scene gracefully, with unconditional love for this ragamuffin group of fishermen. They are not getting what they might expect from Christ, but instead gentle reminders and an invitation to be what Jesus has taught them to be. They are being re-commissioned to do the work of feeding and caring for everyone out there. Not the fish in the sea, not the sheep in the field, but the people who have yet to hear the good news of God's love and forgiveness.

I love this Easter story. It is the subtle way that Jesus brings the disciples, with Peter in the lead, to the understanding that if they listen to him and continue to follow him they will continue to accomplish all that is ahead of them. They did. They traveled and taught and continued to draw more people near to God through the love of Christ.

Through the disciple's work, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we have the four Gospel stories of Christ's teachings. They along with other converts – Paul being the most notable, began to spread the good news of Jesus Christ all across the Mediterranean.

This is a story of the call to the mission field. Each of us have heard a call to reach outside our own comfortable boxes and to 'think greater.' We may not believe it, but God has been grooming each one of us for a ministry - for the world. Like John and Peter and all of the disciples, we are all different and we all have differing gifts.

Just in this one story Jesus shows us that mission begins with first preparing our hearts for whatever God has in mind for us, then sharing hospitality with those that are put in our path and finally to trust God enough to take a chance on what may be in the future for each of us. You are forgiven; time to put the shame and guilt behind you and look ahead for what is in front of you.

Jesus still asks us the questions: Do you love me? Then feed my sheep!