

Again
John 21:1-14
3rd Sunday of Easter
May 5, 2019
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John 21:1-19 (NRSV) Jesus Appears to Seven Disciples

21 After these things 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,^[a] 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^[b] 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.

Jesus and Peter

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."

In the early Church, Easter was when baptisms happened. The whole year was wrapped around preparing believers for the sacrament that initiated them into the church on that holy day. And the Scripture readings were chosen not just for the newly baptized but also the Christian community around them (we're included) **to remember we have a life in Christ.**

The last couple of Sundays we've recalled the appearances of the resurrected Christ to his followers in Jerusalem.

Jesus IS alive.

Death does not win.

And we have hope for our future in Christ.

The initial terror of the previous week has lessened, but Jesus' disciples are still fearful and unsure of how to go on or "what's next."

So, the disciples go home, to a familiar place, the Sea of Galilee...back to what they did BEFORE Jesus said "follow me," 'cause, don't we get the sense that *they don't know what to think or do with themselves*.

So they go fishing.

And they're not having any luck.

The disciples seem lost.

They also seem to have forgotten the commands that Jesus left with them.

So suddenly, in a reminder for the Christian community that we ARE, this fishing story becomes a metaphor for keeping SIGHT of Jesus even when he's NOT IN sight.

It's not until the fishing men come back to shore with *nada* that they catch sight of "Someone" on the shore who tells them to throw their nets out again – ON THE OTHER SIDE of the boat.

After reading this passage throughout our lives, do you ever just want to shout to the boys in the boat?

Give 'em a bonk on the back of the head, and say, "wake up man!"

Because, of course we know, this is Jesus appearing, **again**, after the resurrection.

AND he's not only helping them catch breakfast, he's helping them get back to where they should be; back to the very first moments of their calling: (it's recorded Matthew 4:19) "...I will make you fish for people."

Proof?

They had had an unsuccessful night of fishing....until they're given instructions and THEY DO what they're told...and their net is so full they can't haul it in.

They needed to remember ...**we need** to remember...to depend on Jesus for the mission.

This is the last appearance of the risen Jesus that John writes in his gospel.

But, Dear Ones, "*who have not seen and yet have come to believe,*" (Jn. 20:29) this isn't Jesus' last appearance is it?

We know it's not.

When we look with the eyes of faith, **WE** see Jesus in the oddest places: on the street corner, in a garden, at our own "sea shores" getaway places.

Sometimes Jesus is hungry and is asking us for money and other times he's **in** the one inviting **us** to an unexpected meal.

//If we'd read the other lectionary reading, from the book of Acts today, we'd have heard about Saul and Ananias.

Saul who persecutes Christians will become Paul...just after meeting Ananias...and both of them need to leave some things behind.

Saul has letters from the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem giving him "permission" to literally "drag" new Christians back to the capitol city for trial. Those letters hold power. At least that's what Saul thinks.

Ironically, it's those *very* letters that bring Saul to know the "what comes next" of Easter. On the road to Damascus he is blinded by a bright light and hears the voice of the Lord.

After that encounter Saul is changed.

He's discovered power REALLY wasn't in the letters.

Power was of God AND in God's grace.

And hear this: God doesn't condemn Saul for his past.

Instead he was told to begin something new.

And we never hear about the letters again.

We have to know that they were left somewhere, but Saul couldn't hold onto those letters AND grab hold of the new life IN CHRIST.

Can't have it both ways.

Ananias comes into the picture here (it's his only appearance in Scripture.)

He was a follower of Jesus; actually someone Saul was coming after.

He'd made *his* choice to follow Jesus and thought that's what God wanted him to do.

He knew about Saul; that enemy of the Church.

And he was comfortable "hating Saul back" – 'cause that allowed Ananias to feel like he was "better."

And he'd be downright crazy to reach out to someone he'd named evil and stupid.

It had to be a little upsetting for Ananias to hear that Saul had changed...and was chosen BY GOD to build up God's kingdom.

"Why that awful, dangerous man?"

Ananias had to choose between ignoring God's prompting and CHOOSING to obey.

The main thing we know about Ananias is that he chose well and left behind HIS hate and prejudice of Saul. That was like giving up the power-filled letters.

But he chose, took the risk, and gave to the church (and the world) the ministry of (now) Paul.

Are you wondering "what's this got to do with Peter?"

Well, the end of today's reading is about Peter.

It says there are seven disciples at the Sea, and while they are included in the lessons we're learning today, IT'S ABOUT Peter.

All of those men have been following Jesus but, the messiah-chasing had become too much. So much of TOO MUCH for Peter, remember, that he had denied Jesus three times and ran.

So, he, along with the others, took a break, 'cause with Jesus gone, there were fish to catch, they had to make a living.

And it's RIGHT THEN, right there doing something NOT about reaching others for the Kingdom of God, that Peter is once again face-to-face with Jesus.

When he comes on shore, it's after the "someone they didn't recognize" had told him to put his net out AGAIN on the other side of the boat. And Peter comes in with a net full of fish...that are worth a lot of money; enough to start up the business again.

All Peter had to do was get those fish to market before they rotted.

But instead, Peter stayed for a meal.

John, it says, recognized Jesus and they ALL clamored to get to shore.

And around a charcoal fire Jesus said, "Come and have some breakfast."

When the Lord broke the bread, Peter and the others *knew AGAIN*.

THINGS changed again!

The resurrection was real.

And another choice had to be made...like Saul's letters and Ananias' prejudice...THE fish were left.

They were left in the same place as the letters and the fear: they were left behind.

Behind is a good place.

There's plenty of room...which is good 'cause don't WE have a few things we could leave behind?

When we recall the early church and those people being readied for their baptism...

...and then we think about us, today, and we think about being changed - in terms of our life in Christ, somebody (don't blame the preacher) gives us something. Something is added to who we are.

But, I'd like us ALL to consider that being changed (like a newly baptized, newly "in" the Lord person) isn't adding something; it is about giving something up.

Too often, what stands between us and the change that we need to make to be able to live in our “new-ness” better, isn’t something we lack and think we need to add, but something we have and refuse to let go of.

In Acts and in John, Scripture tells us today about Paul, Ananias, and Peter. They each had different issues, (power, prejudice, painted trout) but they had this in common: they had to make a choice - between something THEY THOUGHT WAS very important and very real to them AND the call of God.

And be sure, the CALL OF GOD, even when it’s clear, involves risk. None of their choices were easy.

I wish there was something I could hold up or pass out to you, something tangible that would show us “This. This is what we need to give up and we’d be changed.”

But, even if there was a list probably it wouldn’t be complete. And it would miss the point.

Most of us have a “piles of fish” or “important letters”
We know what those are for us.
We know our issues. Somebody has probably been trying to point them out to us.
We don’t need that sort of reminding.

What we do need is to be reminded of, and the real point of it all, is that our newness in our own resurrection living BECAUSE Jesus lives is real.

Paul had an amazing NEW career without his letters of authority.
Ananias received MUCH more by surrendering his negative attitude.
And Peter didn’t need his fishing business nearly as much as he thought.

The resurrection is real.
Jesus was among the disciples in the Upper Room.
And he’s with most of them AGAIN at the sea shore.

And because the resurrection IS real (say that: THE RESURRECTION IS REAL!) we have hope and can move forward in the call we've been given to follow Jesus and go fishing for people...just like the first disciples...for Jesus Christ.

There is a pile of rotten fish out there, with a few official letters, and some other stuff on it.

We have our things to add to that pile.

And that is all right, 'cause like Paul, God has forgotten our pasts, to.

Christ is risen and that means that the choices Peter, Paul, and Ananias made, and that **we are called to make**, are possible.

They can be done.

And these choices lead to a fuller and better life.

Amen!