

“Start the Day with a Hearty Breakfast!”

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Scriptures: John 21:1-14 (The Message)

1 After this, Jesus appeared again to the disciples, this time at the Tiberias Sea (the Sea of Galilee).

This is how he did it: 2 Simon Peter, Thomas (nicknamed "Twin"), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the brothers Zebedee, and two other disciples were together.

3 Simon Peter announced, "I'm going fishing."

4 When the sun came up, Jesus was standing on the beach, but they didn't recognize him. 5 Jesus spoke to them: "Good morning! Did you catch anything for breakfast?" They answered, "No."

6 He said, "Throw the net off the right side of the boat and see what happens." They did what he said. All of a sudden there were so many fish in it, they weren't strong enough to pull it in.

7 Then the disciple Jesus loved said to Peter, "It's the Master!" 8 The other disciples came in by boat for they weren't far from land, a hundred yards or so, pulling along the net full of fish. 9 When they got out of the boat, they saw a fire laid, with fish and bread cooking on it.

10 Jesus said, "Bring some of the fish you've just caught." 11 Simon Peter joined them and pulled the net to shore - 153 big fish! And even with all those fish, the net didn't rip. 12 Jesus said, "Breakfast is ready." Not one of the disciples dared ask, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Master...14 This was now the third time Jesus had shown himself alive to the disciples since being raised from the dead.

Sermon

Today I'll ask Pricilla a couple of questions about fishing.

In today's gospel, for the Fifth Sunday in Epiphany, the writer of John Gospel powerfully stitches together two crucial traditions of memory. One is the miraculous catch of fish also found near the beginning of Luke's gospel and the other is the call of fishermen to become Jesus' disciples, also at the beginning of not only Luke's gospel, but Mark's as well. Each theme is so important to the vocation of following Christ, especially for us now who are trying to remain faithful to Jesus.

Many of us are currently living in fear, confusion and uncertainty. We are asking ourselves what can we do in response to the seemingly overwhelming challenges that confront us? So much of what was once considered good and decent in our nation has been turned on its head. Some of us are perhaps still in shock from the results of the election, still grieving that loss as we now must face the new pain and further displacement being inflicted upon those whom we love and who face the brunt of our government's abominable behavior. Perhaps, like some of those boats along the shore of Galilee that morning we too are feeling unmoored, hopeless and helpless, tossed to and fro by winds and currents we are unable to control?

Speaking of fishing boats, let's look at the passage we just read a bit closer to see if we can find some help to face our imminent situation? First let me set the context a bit. The events take place, we are told, "some time" after the sham trial, torture, death and the resurrection of Jesus. Just prior to this

scene along the lakeshore of Galilee, John tells us about the sudden and dramatic appearance of Jesus to his disciples while they were hiding out, huddled together, with the doors locked and the shades pulled, fearing for their lives in some “upper room” in Jerusalem. As very public accomplices they certainly had every reason to be hiding in fear, expecting that Roman soldiers might, at anytime, “suddenly appear” by breaking through the door to arrest them and carry them off to share in the same fate as Jesus.

Perhaps wisely Jesus instructed them to literally, “get outta town! head for Galilee where he’d rendezvous with them. And so they did, leaving Jerusalem and returning to the rural fishing village where they had first met Jesus.

Likely still grieving the loss of a good friend and inspiring teacher, they were also likely grieving the loss of the many hopes and promises of the new world reality that he had led them to put their faith and trust into.

They were certainly unmoored, feeling hopeless and helpless and as well, still likely fearing for their very lives. Waiting around for the next shoe to drop the always impetuous Peter, not able to merely remain indoors and silent said, “F’ this, I’m going fishin’!” A rather curious response don’t you think? For someone who was given the nickname “Rock” by Jesus, Peter never seemed all that steady or consistent. Typically, he seemed to act without much preparation and spoke without much forethought. Perhaps we miss translate the nickname and instead, maybe Jesus actually named him, “Rocky” as in difficult to traverse with lots of ups and downs and uncertainty as well as stones to stumble over all over the place?

But being the charismatic type, Peter managed to get some of his fellow desperadoes to join him. I guess, perhaps sometimes, when you don’t know what to do, it’s best to just do anything! Stand on a corner with a sign, write a letter, send a check to some church or organization that you know is trying to do some good. Maybe even pray?! And if you are paralyzed by analysis or fear into inaction, another option is to go back to doing what you know best? Peter didn’t know what to do so he went back to his previous vocation, one which had been interrupted by Jesus’ mesmerizing words and silly ideas - that did make a lot of sense.

So, they pushed off from shore, just as they had so many times before, returning to the only other life that they had ever known. But after spending the entire night hard at it, at that most familiar of endeavors, they still came up empty. Not at all the cathartic or even the practical sustainable action of procuring something to eat or to sell for some much needed cash, they had likely been hoping for. And then suddenly a stranger appeared adding insult to injury. “Hey fellas, have you caught anything? When they embarrassingly replied that they had not, the stranger managed an additional dig by offering them some unsolicited fishing advice.

I mean who does that? Give advice to experienced fishermen! The stranger continues, “Have you tried dropping your nets not just on the left side of the boat but on the right side as well?” I can hear them grinding their teeth trying to avoid saying what they really wanted to say. As if they hadn’t

already thought of and done that! They had, after all, been fishing all night long and had likely dropped their nets from every conceivable angle and in every conceivable location as possible.

“Who does this guy think he is?” They probably muttered along with some other rather choice words. They were of course fishermen after all, a pretty rough and rather coarse group of folks at the lower levels of that society. But they did manage to drop their net just one more time and this time their nets began to break under the weight of the overwhelming number of fish they had suddenly been able to trap. That meant, of course, that this was no ordinary stranger merely strolling along the shore dispensing tips on fishing!

Now most New Testament scholars believe that this “disciple whom Jesus loved” was actually John, the writer of this eponymous Gospel. (I guess when you write your own gospel you get to use whatever potentially self aggrandizing language you want to?) “Hey that’s no fool just strolling along the shore, it is the Master!” John exclaimed to Peter. While in Luke’s telling of this story it was the ever steady “Rock” who impetuously blurts out this claim.

But in Mark’s recollection of fishing along the shore, it was the opportunist, Jesus, who initially called for Peter and his friends to come and join him in his compelling God inspired work! For Jesus was overheard to say, “Come, follow me and I will send you out to catch people.’ And at once they left their nets and followed him.”

And now, only a few years later, into the midst of their despair, uncertainty and tangible fear, Jesus showed up again along the same lakeshore. Jesus had not forgotten them. Jesus did not forget his promises to them. Jesus did not leave them unmoored along the shore to be cast about by the winds and currents of fate. And he returned to them, not only with sage and helpful fishing tips, but most importantly with new power and a new reason to hope, called resurrection! Not only did he have a hearty breakfast waiting for them so as to sustain them on their new journey, but more importantly he showed up to remind them of the more important vocation to which he had called them to - “to catch people!” To go out into the world and get more folks tangled up in the nets of God’s new Kingdom!

I am not certain if our current situation is as dire as the one Peter and his band of merry men had been facing. Resisting the machinations of the Roman Empire was likely just a bit more daunting than the current political landscape that we face. They also were facing a religious establishment that was fully colluding with the Roman Empire.

Perhaps the possibility of real change likely seemed even more impossible than it appears to us today. But let me be clear, Jesus is still with us. Jesus is with those who seek to follow after him. And though the way of Jesus is typically unpopular, it does quite often attract and catch up a lot of people in its nets! And of course, rather than the size of the fish or the number that is caught, more important is the fact that it is Jesus who is the fisherman whom we follow. It is Jesus who is our King! It is Jesus who is our President! And it is Jesus the Christ who is now and always has been Lord! Just like in today’s reading, Jesus seems to always be popping up to remind us of what he wants us to be doing.

Jesus wants us to keep on fishin', fishin' for folks and getting them all caught up in the works of love, mercy and justice. It's all about changing the hearts and minds of folks just like our hearts and minds have been radically changed.

This is our story, this too must be our song - to bring hope and truth into existence. The call upon our lives has not changed because Jesus has not changed! Some in this nation seem to think that Jesus is just all right, all right with us persecuting the poor and the stranger. How absurd! Jesus has not changed! Though the political winds and tides may change, God's truth is still alive and more valid than ever!

As always, we do not do this not alone, but we walk and fish together and as I look out at all of you this morning - there's no better group of fishin' buddies if you ask me! So be sure to eat a hearty breakfast, because who knows each day might have in store?