

St. Mark's Episcopal Church  
Albuquerque, New Mexico  
Sunday May 5, 2019 Easter 3C  
Text: John 21: 1-19 Night Fishing  
Preacher: Rev. Christopher McLaren, Rector  
Theme: Following Jesus into a New Day

*This what God's Kingdom is like; a bunch of outcasts and oddballs gathered at a table. Not because they are rich or worthy or good. But because they are hungry and because they said yes, and there's always room for more.*

- Rachel Held Evans

"I am going fishing." That is what Peter said. Peter is returning to his old ways. His beloved teacher and friend are dead and what is left? When I say "I'm going fishing it is to step into an adventure with the finny tribe. But Peter is saying something different. It's over. He's dead. The movement and excitement are done and we need to figure out what we are going to do. He doesn't remember the call that is on his life to become a fisher of people, instead he returns to his old way of life. The forward is to go backward to what they know. Peter is not alone in his resignation and loss and so he is joined by several others as they ply the waters on the Sea of Tiberius.

Do you remember the last time Jesus was by the Sea of Tiberius? It is was early in his ministry, he was teaching in the Galilean outback and people were hungry, a young boy had a lunch of a few barley loaves and some dried fish (John 6: 1-14) which Jesus made into a feast for both his disciples and the multitude. In John's Gospel this was a sign. Jesus was showing his disciples that he was the source of sustaining spiritual food, that he was giving himself to them. But like the crowds, they had a hard time understanding the meaning of the feeding. Now Jesus is by the Sea a second time, and once again he will feed them with bread and fish. His resurrected presence will do what his earthly presence did. In doing so, he will show himself to be the source of spiritual food that sustains life. Jesus gives himself for the life of the world, he offers himself to all who are hungry.

The scene reminds me of a song that I learned at a Kirtan Mass years ago:

*Calling out to hungry hearts  
Everywhere through endless time  
You who wander, you who thirst  
I offer you this heart of mine.*

*Calling out to hungry hearts  
Everywhere through endless time  
Calling out to hungry hearts  
All the lost and the left behind  
Gather round and share this meal  
Your joy and your sorrow, I make it mine.*

As a fisherman, I was fascinated by the metaphor of fishing at the center of this gospel story. In the commentaries a great deal is made of fishing as a metaphor for the hidden depths being revealed. Just as the spiritual is a present but unseen reality, so fishing reveals something that was there all along but is hidden by the waters. The story of finally catching fish after a long night of failure is about the manifestation of something that was hidden. This story then is about bringing the unconscious spiritual depths into the light of awareness, into the new day of the disciples.

If we are to understand this story symbolically, fishing at night then becomes an image of a darkened consciousness, of misunderstanding what it means to follow Jesus. Jesus himself, the resurrected one stands on the other side of night.

Clearly Peter plays a central role in this Resurrection story with Jesus on the shore of the lake. Peter always seems a bit clueless about what Jesus is up to just like he did at the foot washing at the last meal they had shared. If you remember, Peter refused to let Jesus wash his feet. It was a challenging moment as Jesus attempted to serve his very own disciples, pouring out the divine love of God into his followers. But Peter would have none of it. The master is not to wash the feet of his disciples. Quite to the contrary the disciple ought to wash the master's feet. This strange reversal did not sit well with Peter but it contained a powerful spiritual truth that he needed to understand if he was going to share in Jesus' life. Peter has much to learn from Jesus, the primary posture for the disciple is that of receptivity. Jesus is the giver of life and from him we have received "grace upon grace" but Peter does not yet understand it just as we struggle to know this in our hearts. Remember Peter says, "not only my feet but my head and my hands as well." Peter is willing to be sure, but he wants to control the terms of engagement rather than allowing Jesus to. As one writer put it, "Peter is in the poignant position of loving Jesus and wanting to be with him, but at the same time not understanding him.

When Peter says, "I am going out to fish" he is taking his life back into his own hands. It reveals a lack of spiritual understanding of the continuing mission of Jesus and all this is involved, there is work to do but not the work Peter has chosen. Peter and the others are missing something, their consciousness is darkened, symbolized by fishing at night. Peter must learn the source of the life he is looking for, but first he must have a dark night of the soul, a night of fishing without success.

Morning is always a symbol of enlightenment. There is still hope for Peter to understand about the foot washing, to understand his need to receive the divine life as a gift from the hand of Jesus. The futility of the night is giving way to the break of day.

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children you have no fish, have you?"

Jesus waits on the other side of night. He calls to his disciples and offers them a new lesson. They are children of the most-high, they are to live as children of light, as children of God, an identity that they will never outgrow. "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave the power to become children of God, who were born not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of a man, but of God. (John 1:12-13).

The disciples in the boat do what Jesus tells them to after a long night of catching nothing. Suddenly the nets are full, full to breaking, full like the baskets of bread gathered up after the feeding of the 5,000, full of surprise, full of life. What was hidden is being revealed.

Abundance is almost always a sign of the presence of God. And at least one of the disciples in the boat, the one who loved Jesus realizes what is happening. He says, "it is the Lord." It is Jesus who is on the beach, it is the Risen One who is directing their lives toward abundance. It is the Risen One who surprises with so many fish. It is the Risen One who will draw them to himself.

Peter leaps into the water, making for Jesus. He is full of joy and desire. Peter is hungry: hungry for breakfast after a long night of fishing, hungry to repent of his denials of his friend, hungry for resurrection, hungry for a new day in the kingdom of God. Peter swims, throwing himself into the depths of the sea, covering his nakedness, but making his way toward the Risen One. Peter swims from human emptiness toward divine fullness, from the scarcity of his own fears toward the abundance of Christ's love.

Peter's threefold denial of Jesus occurred while he warmed himself at a charcoal fire in the courtyard of the high priest at night. Peter may fear that his denials have excluded him from God's love and that he now lives in shame and failure. But around this new fire Peter will break bread and celebrate the wonder of the resurrection. He will be offered the ready forgiveness of Jesus and given a chance to proclaim his love of Christ in a powerful threefold way undoing his denials and leading him back into the mission of Christ. Bread and fish, an early lakeside Eucharist, tell us of the divine love and of Christ's life for the world. **Peter, joins Jesus for this breakfast of a new day, realizing that the sustenance for his new life is being cooked on the fire of his past failures. Nothing is wasted in the kingdom of God, our failures lead to our turnings, our sins to our repentance, our hungers to the sacred meal.**

The band of disciples gather for breakfast with Jesus on the beach. The Risen Christ is known by the same activities as the earthly Jesus. He prepares a meal and invites the disciples to breakfast, to a meal that symbolizes a new day. "Come and eat breakfast," Jesus says. But it is ultimately Jesus who comes to them and feeds them with his very self. As one commentator put it, "Jesus is both invitation and meal, the one who initiates and sustains the divine human dynamics." What is it the disciple,

we must do? We must engage in the important and difficult act of eating; we must receive our sustenance from the hand of the Risen One.

The story ends with a powerful vision of a community meal bringing people together to feast on the divine presence of the Risen One. Whenever the communal meal brings people into consciousness of God's love and one another, we know who is feeding them, "it is the Lord." Peter who earlier would not allow Jesus to wash his feet will let Jesus feed him now in this new day. The experience of Jesus on the beach changes Peter, opens him up to love in a new way. Peter knows the Risen One and the power of God at work in him. He discovers his spiritual identity. He is not "just a fisherman." He gives himself to the Risen One, "Lord, you know everything: you know that I love you." Jesus is not just Peter's friend, he is his source of life and the One he will follow with a servant's heart. And this is what we are invited into as well, to Follow Jesus, to see him as the source of our life and to open ourselves up to live the life of Jesus, to give our life for his friends.

Today Jesus will again prepare a meal, not of fish and bread, though that would be quite nice. It is a meal of his own self, it is the life sustaining food of the Risen One, it is food for the journey, a journey that can be confusing, demanding, discouraging, joyful, challenging, painful, and full of surprises. Jesus will offer himself to us as sacred food for this journey into faith. All that is necessary is to receive it, to accept it as gift, to take it in and let it nurture our souls, heal our woundedness and fire our hearts. Every Eucharist is an invitation out of the emptiness of fishing in the dark and into the abundance of God's new day. Are you hungry? Jesus calls to every hungry heart. Soon the table will be ready.

*Calling out to hungry hearts  
Everywhere through endless time  
You who wander, you who thirst  
I offer you this heart of mine.*

*Calling all you hungry spirits  
Everywhere through endless time  
Calling out to hungry hearts  
All the lost and the left behind  
Gather round this sacred meal  
Your joy and your sorrow, I make it mine.  
(music – "Calling All Hungry", by Krishna Das)*

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