

May 5 2019

John 21:1-19

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

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?" They answered him, "No." He 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. That 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. But 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.

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

When 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." A 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." He 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. Very 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." (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

Psalm 30

All praise to You, O Beloved,
for You have raised me up,
and have not let my fears
overwhelm me.

O Compassionate One, I cried
for help, and You
comforted me.

You, O Love, helped me release
my soul from despair;
You gave me strength to face
my fears; now
love is awakening in me.

Sing praises to the Beloved,
All you saints,
giving thanks to Love's holy Name.
Love withdraws when we close our hearts,
yet ever awaits an open door.
In the evening we may weep,
yet joy comes with the morning.

In my prosperity, I had lost sight
of Love,
I found power in my wealth.
In your mercy, O Beloved, my foundations
You shook,
and in recognizing my separation
from You,
I was dismayed.

I cried to You for help; to You,
I pleaded for forgiveness:
"What profit in my riches if
I am separated from Love?
Will emptiness praise You?
Will it tell of your faithfulness?"

Hear me, O Beloved, and be gracious to me!
O Love, hasten to my assistance.”

And You turned my mourning into dancing;
You set me free and
clothed me with gladness.
My soul rejoices and is glad in You;
songs of gratitude fill My soul
rising up to You, O Beloved.

From Psalms for Praying © 2007 Nan C. Merrill

SERMON:

“May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing to you, my Rock and my Redeemer.”

At a time in my life when my world was turned upside down by death, when I wasn't sure who I was or what I was doing, I easily connected to the disciples in these post Easter stories. Questions like - What does life hold for us now? How to find meaning and purpose? This isn't what I signed up for! Were with me.

I have stories of finding normalcy in something as simple as the dropping of a freshly canned jar of applesauce, and feeling angry - noticing anger at something as ordinary as a broken jar and sensing relief in it.

But I remember sensing the blessedness of the ordinary one day while out digging sweet potatoes. If you've never dug sweet potatoes, put it on your bucket list of ordinary and wonderful things to do - it's like digging for treasure. And, it was a job my kids enjoyed. What a bonus! The day I have in mind was an October day - clear blue sky, crisp air that made you feel alive. I was going along with the shovel, loosening the earth, trying to gently pry the sweet potatoes from the grip of the soil without breaking them. Then the kids would come behind me, pull up the plants and root around in the soil with their hands, pulling forth these gems of all shapes and sizes. 'Look mama, this one's the size of a football!!!' and it would be carefully laid on top of the soil to dry, because as big and solid as they are, newly dug sweet potatoes are fragile - they need to cure in the sun and heat in order to go into storage. Exclamations of delight, laughter bubbling up at the joy of discovery - each of us doing our task; this simple, ordinary task of harvesting. I remember stopping and looking around - noticing the day, feeling the warmth of the sun on my back, the joy of working together as a family, and thinking, 'I am blessed. Yes, I am blessed. It doesn't get any better than this'. I was filled with a sense of gratitude. Yes, life has been hard, holds its share of sorrow, and it's beautiful.

This ordinary moment of hard work is a gift - for we're in it together. Sorrow, loss, wasn't the whole story. In that moment, joy was in there too.

What was it like for the disciples? Were they, too, trying to return to their former life, to find some meaning, maybe even some joy in the tasks of work? Broken, changed, yet trying to find some normalcy, some sense of who they are, now that Jesus is gone and hasn't been seen for some time? We don't know how long after Jesus' death and resurrection this story takes place. The last encounter with the risen Jesus was a week after his resurrection when he appeared to Thomas and the others, standing among them saying "Peace be with you." That was in Jerusalem. Another place, another time. Now we find 7 of the disciples back on their home turf, no longer waiting behind locked doors, waiting for Jesus to return to them and tell them what to do. Now we find them alongside the Sea of Galilee.

Peter and his friends are living in the *meantime* -- the time of waiting on God's next move. Has confusion set in as they realize they can't go back, and they don't know the way forward? Their lives had been a narrative of invitation to join with Jesus in God's mission. Now they're stuck, needing to somehow reclaim their lives. So what do they do when waiting on God's next move? They do what they know - they go fishing.

It's just after daybreak when the action begins. It's been a long night of nothing, of failure. Someone calls to them from shore - 'cast your net to the right side of the boat'. They listened, and in the moment of abundance that followed, they recognized who called to them from the shore: Jesus. Jesus. The one who has come to bring life, and bring it abundantly. Here we are, the last story in this gospel, back in Galilee, with Jesus providing so much more than is needed. Someone called to them, but it wasn't until they hauled in those nets that were nearly bursting with fish that they know who it is. *They recognize him as he surprises them with abundance.*

This story here at the end of John's gospel brings together so many different images and events of the gospel. It's as if the writer thought - wait, one more story to help make sense of Jesus ministry, from beginning to end. You see, the first miracle in this

gospel also happened in Galilee - do you remember it? We often call it 'the wedding at Cana'. There it was wine - wine filling 6 stone jars - enough wine to last for days. John's gospel is bookended by stories of miracles of abundance. And it's not until they experience his abundance that they recognize him. I have come that you may have life, and have it abundantly.

Our story goes on 'when they had gone ashore, there was a charcoal fire there...' A charcoal fire. The last mention of a charcoal fire was in chapter 18, when Peter stood warming himself around one, having fled the garden where Jesus was captured, denying his connection to this man to whom he had committed his life. This charcoal fire, this one made by Jesus to feed his disciples, it's around this fire that Jesus turns and asks "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"

Simon, son of John. Again, it was back in the first chapter of this gospel, where Andrew found his brother, telling him "We have found the Messiah", excitedly bringing Simon to meet Jesus for the first time, when Jesus said "You are Simon, son of John. You are to be called Peter". (John 1:42) Now, at the end, this final story in John's gospel, Jesus returns to Peter's given name: "Simon, son of John", that name by which he was known and identified, the name which was used before his first encounter with Jesus. Here on the beach, Jesus and Peter return to the beginning, no nicknames or false intimacy. It's as if Jesus is saying, what will it be? Who are you? Are you Simon, son of John - have you returned to the life of fisherman, denying your discipleship, or are you Peter? It's here that Peter is brought back to that original choice to follow.

Who are you? Story of spiritual direction - asked this 10 times...

Who are you, Peter or Simon, son of John? You see, back in chapter 18, at that charcoal fire in the courtyard of the high priest, Peter is asked "aren't you one of his disciples?" In the other 3 gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, the question posed to Peter is 'do you know the man?' To which he replied "I don't know the man'. But here, in this gospel, the inquiry posed to Peter is "aren't you one of his disciples?" Peter's

response? I am not. *Who are you then, Peter, or Simon, Son of John?* Peter's true rejection is of his own identity. I am not a disciple. I am not.

In this encounter on the beach, Jesus is calling Peter (Simon, son of John) to step out of the place of self-imposed exile resulting from his betrayal, to choose, again who he is, and to choose to step into a new life of service. Simon, son of John, is given the choice. This threefold question here echos the 3 fold denial in chapter 18.

Now, face to face, Jesus asks Simon, son of John, 'Do you love me?' And how does Peter respond? Not, 'yes, I love you', but "you know that I love you". When we fail to love, it's a fearful act to profess that love again. Does Peter want to say, "I love you, I know I love you!"? What does Peter know about himself in that moment? In saying 'you know that I love you', Peter is relying not on his own knowledge of himself - that has betrayed him in the past, no, he's relying on the fullness of God's knowledge of himself. God knows. Jesus knows.

You know that I love you.

In each answer, Jesus gives a charge: feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep. Jesus connects Peter's love for him to his love and care for others. There is no blame, no shame. Jesus doesn't revisit the past, instead, Jesus tells Peter to live out his love by caring for the sheep of God's pasture. It's as if Jesus is saying, "You are Peter. Claim your life as Peter, my disciple. **I believe in you. I know who you are and I love you. And yes, you are exactly the disciple I need, the disciple the world needs now.**"

Can you hear those words offered to you? No matter how we have betrayed our Lord in big or little ways, how we may have denied our calling to love, *God knows our deepest identity* and says to each one of us - claim it. I know who you are, I believe in you, I love you - so go, feed my sheep, tend my sheep, feed my lambs. There's work to do.

John's gospel begins with this Simon, son of John following Jesus down the road. Here we are at the end, again with the call to Follow me - come and see. Come, so that you may have life, and have it abundantly. *It's the call for all of us.*

Jesus continually surprised his followers with acts of generous love and abundance. Even around charcoal fires that held difficult memories. It's in unexpected acts of abundance that they most easily recognize him. In this story, he doesn't look back, no Jesus looked forward. There's work to do. Jesus calls each of us, knows each of us, and says 'you are exactly the disciple I need, the world needs'.

So this week I challenge you to do one thing. Just one. It doesn't have to be big. But I want you to come back next Sunday and tell me, or the person sitting next to you. What's one way you tended, feed, loved God's beloved? Because this is our call too - not just Peter's. We're called to claim our identity as sons and daughters of the risen Christ and to follow him.