

## *Let's go Fishing!*

The Rev. Nancy Willet  
John 21: 1-19

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter

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We have come now to the third Sunday of Easter. I'll bet the Easter baskets have been put away. The plastic eggs are stored until next spring. The cross which was so beautifully adorned with flowers just two Sundays ago has been cleaned off and put back out in the storage shed. We are back to life as usual, doing the things we have always done; returning to our regular routines. The disciples have returned back to their usual routine as well. There is just something comforting in doing the routine, isn't there?

I think, the "usual" in our world has probably changed, though. For most of us, our sensory systems have become a bit immune to a things that, several decades ago would have put us in sensory overload—increasingly graphic images of sex and violence in the media, on TV, and on the internet, increasing decibel levels in television commercials, not to mention the bah-boom, bah-boom you hear from the car stereos that pull up next to you at a stoplight.

It makes me wonder if we all might require just a little bit more to go into sensory overload today than we did 20 years ago. What about emotional overload, though? We humans are pretty resilient when it comes to emotional issues—most of us are. For some of us it takes something extreme for us to go into emotional overload--the death of a child or a spouse. When you may receive the news of a grim medical diagnosis, or your spouse walks out of your marriage.

You know, the human spirit can only take so much, and at one time or another in our life, we will all experience an emotional overload. And, how do most of us handle those times? We find ways to escape, to find comfort in the usual routines of sometimes-mindless activities. Some lose themselves in the solitary laboring of gardening; others reach for chocolate or go shopping. Some may stay late hours at the office and bury themselves in their work.

I think the disciples had to be feeling some of this emotional overload too during the last weeks of Jesus' life—from the emotional high as they entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, and on through all the events leading up to that very day. Jesus cleansing the temple, a Passover meal, which was like one they had never had before, the intense moments in the garden of Gethsemane, an unexpected betrayal, an armed arrest, denials, a mock trial, jeering, and a bloody, horrific death on the cross. Surely the disciples following Jesus' death were crushed and numb. Yes, the human spirit can only take so much."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gary D. Jones, *Feasting on the Word: Pastoral Perspective*. John 21: 1-19, Third Sunday of Easter. Pg. 422.

So how did Peter handle this overload? He announced, "I'm going fishing." Back to the routine, back to something that doesn't cause our spirits to ache, back to something we don't really have to think about.

However, as we are about to see from our passage today, we really *can't* ever go back. We really *can't* ever escape that emotional mark that *God in Christ* has left on our soul. Our Psalm today reminded us of that: "Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast" (Ps. 139:7-9).

Even in those extreme times of emotional overload, Jesus Christ is there. Jesus will always ultimately be there.

Let's look at the two very different ways Peter and John reacted to Jesus' appearance to them on the beach. I think it says a lot about our faith today. (It is assumed that John is the disciple that Jesus loved).

Peter reacted in a very strange way—to say the least. Some commentaries say that Peter may not have been completely naked, but wore a loincloth. But why would he put on clothes *before* jumping into the water? Other commentaries compare this scene to Adam in the garden when he realized he was naked and hid himself from God. The difference here, however, comes in the significance of the resurrection as the *undoing* of the shame of Adam. Yes, Peter was naked, yes, Peter was a sinner and had shame, but he did not allow his shame to keep him from Jesus. His shame did not shut him down and keep him from acting. "Peter doesn't hide anymore in shame, but leaps with joy toward the one he loves".<sup>2</sup>

John, on the other hand, was the one who actually recognized Jesus. Did you realize that none of the gospel stories have the disciples catching any fish without the help of Jesus? It was after their nets were bursting with fish that Jesus had called forth that John leaned over to Peter and said, "It is the Lord!"

John, the one who reclined next to Jesus at the Last Supper was the one who recognized Jesus and announced it to Peter. Could it be that spending intimate, tender time with Jesus, in quiet immersion in God's world is the way we recognize Christ in our lives? Could it be that our impetuous acts like jumping out of the boat and swimming to shore, or building 3 booths on the mount of transfiguration, going fishing, and just plain needing to stay busy all the time keep us from recognizing the risen Christ in our everyday lives? Could be.

In the end, though, Jesus gives Peter and us a way to recognize him if we are the busy, active, gotta-do-something type instead of the more

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<sup>2</sup> Joseph A. Bessler. *Feasting on the Word: Theological Perspective*. John 21: 1-19, Third Sunday of Easter. Pg. 424.

contemplative, introspective John-type. Three times Jesus tells Peter to feed his sheep. We can recognize Christ and encounter God in the hungry and poor.

This vision Jesus has for all his disciples seems to be centered on food and love—on feeding and loving others. Jesus provides the food—as in the fish in the net, he even cooks it for them and serves them breakfast on the beach, and now he tells us to do the same for others.

It's no wonder that our Christian worship is centered on a meal as well. Every month before we share communion, I say, "This is the table that the Lord has prepared." Jesus feeds and nourishes us spiritually so we can go out and feed his sheep and love others. Feeding the hungry is one of the most direct ways we can follow Jesus.

So, whether you act as Peter or as John when you go into overload and are overwhelmed, Jesus shows us how to recognize him during those times. We all need a little of both Peter and John in us, I think. Reclining at the breast of Jesus in prayer, periodically just resting in the presence of God will sharpen our spiritual vision and allow us to recognize the nurturing presence of the Lord in even the most trying of situations.

Feeding the Lord's sheep is a tangible, hands-on way of staying in relationship with the Lord, as well as the surest way to express our deep love and gratitude for him.

So, let's go fishing this afternoon! But, while we're out there on that river, listen for God's voice. Meet our risen Lord in the beauty of nature and the magnificence of creation. Come back to town ready to feed others and revel in the vision God has for us all.

Amen.