

The Third Sunday of Easter: Holy Trinity Church: May 1, 2022

John 21: 1-19: Jesus Epilogue: P.S. I love you

Preached

By

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen

Our gospel reading this evening/morning from John chapter 21 is the epilogue, the post script of this gospel. Simon Peter is in a restless and agitated mood in the midst of his dark night of the soul. He is brooding, thinking deep thoughts not quite sure what to make of all that happened. Finally in typical fashion, Simon Peter gets impatient. He can't take it anymore, and he says, "I'm going fishing!" Now it's as if Simon is saying, "I can't handle this any longer. This waiting is driving me up the wall. I'm worn out with indecision. I'm tired of hiding. I am anxious about the risk involved. I'm going back to the old secure life, the old life of being a fisherman. So, the other disciples go along with him.

They fish throughout the dark night, but no luck. But then as dawn breaks, they see someone standing on shore. It's the Risen Lord, but they don't

recognize him at this point. Jesus tells them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat. They do so, and they bring in a huge catch of fish. John turns and says to Peter, "It is the Lord." Simon Peter, excitable and impulsive as ever, dives into the sea and swims to shore urgently. The others come in on the boat. As they come ashore they see the Risen Christ cooking breakfast for them over a charcoal fire. After he serves them breakfast, he takes Simon Peter off to the side and three times he asks him the same question: "Simon, do you love me?" "Oh yes, Lord," Simon answers. "You know that I love you." "Then, feed my sheep," the Risen Lord says to him." The story ends exactly the way it started with Christ saying to Simon at the seashore these words, "Follow me!" This is a great gospel story, not only because it falls on the opening weekend of the fishing season, but because it is jam packed with the stuff of life such powerful symbols, such strong emotions, such dramatic lessons. There is a very real and human quality to this story. For one thing we see the disciples fishing and this probably represents their temptation to give up, to throw in the towel, to go back to their old way of life. That's always the temptation for the disciples then and now. It is a temptation for people of faith. When times get tough, we are tempted to give up, to backslide, and to go back to the old lifestyle to our old and familiar ways.

There are a number of things that intrigue me about this gospel story. One is

the precise number of 153 fish caught in the net and the other is the breakfast. Scripture scholars suggest the number 153 may be meant to symbolize the expansion of the church in John's Christian community. But, why does John tell us the details of the breakfast? I believe it is done to highlight the reality of the resurrection of Jesus. John tells us quite clearly that the resurrection is not a vision, the resurrection is not a dream, the resurrection is not some kind of fuzzy hallucination. John tells us the resurrection is not a hoax. The resurrection is not the figment of someone's excited imagination. The resurrection is not a plot or ploy. The resurrection is not the appearance of a phantom or a ghost. No! John tells us, the Risen Jesus defeated death and He is out there sitting by a fire on the seashore cooking breakfast. This is Jesus in his earthly resurrected body eating and talking and having breakfast with his friends.

This is a powerful gospel story charged with emotion, fear, guilt, remorse, excitement, self-doubt, and bewilderment. Simon Peter is feeling all those and much more. He is at the crossroads raising the same question we ought to be dealing with right now. How do we respond to Easter? How do we respond to the Resurrection?

Now, just imagine what is racing through Peter's head. As of yet, Peter and Jesus have not had a heart to heart talk about the three denials. Now he is

sitting down to a meal once again with Jesus. Remember what Peter told Jesus the last time they had a meal together. It was at Passover. Peter told him: Lord I will never betray you; I will lay down my life for you. Simon Peter is facing the most crucial decision of his life: "Which will it be? Will I serve Jesus or go back to my old and familiar way of life and just forget about Him? Or, will I take up the cross of His ministry? Will I go on with it, knowing the great risks involved, knowing painfully that I've already failed miserably once? I denied Him not once, but three times. What if I do that again? Maybe I'm just a coward at heart. Maybe I should just go back to the old secure life on my fishing boat. I can handle that. How could He ever forgive me anyway? How could He ever trust me again? I talked big and bragged big. I boasted about my strength and commitment to Him, but when the time of trial and crisis came I let Him down.

That's what Simon Peter was feeling that day and that's why he was so quick to jump into the water and rush to the shore. He was always impetuous, but there is more to this scene. Peter is desperate to say, "Lord, I'm so sorry I failed you, Lord! I want to be the first to shore. I want to be the first in your presence because I'm so sorry I failed you."

Jesus was so perceptive. He knew what was going on deep down inside of Simon Peter and just as he gave Thomas what he needed by letting him touch

his crucifixion wounds physically; now he reaches out to touch Simon Peter emotionally with the help and healing he needs. He takes Peter aside and says, "Simon, do you love me?" "Oh yes, Lord," Peter answers, "You know that I love you." "Then feed my sheep," Jesus says to him. Now, they go through this ritual three times. "Simon, do you love me?" "Yes Lord, you know I love you." "Then feed my sheep." Why three times? I believe it was to let Simon Peter's three-fold affirmations of love wipe out the bitter memory of his three-fold denial. Jesus was saying to Simon Peter, "I believe in you. You are still the Rock. You can do it, but you have to put your failure behind you. You are forgiven. The slate is wiped clean. You can start over again."

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, this is precisely what the Risen Christ does for us. He knows all about our failures and our fears and He still loves us, He still believes in us and He comes to us like that with healing and forgiveness. Physically we see here In John's epilogue, the reality of the resurrection. Emotionally we see here the beauty of God's amazing grace. God doing things in our life that only God can do.

So what do we, as disciples, learn here at the end of John's gospel, theologically and spiritually? What do we learn here about our Christian faith? This story is all about forgiveness and resurrection. Jesus Christ conquers death, but He also resurrects us. He gives to us new life. That is the

good news of Easter. Most importantly, this story is about love. It is all about God's great love for us and His gracious, sacrificial love for us expressed so magnificently in the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus the Christ. Jesus says to Peter, "If you love me, then feed my sheep." The point is, the best way to love Christ is to love His sheep. He doesn't want burnt offerings or sacrifices or long, flowery prayers, or painfully pious expressions. Jesus just wants us to love! That message to love is so simple and yet it is the authentic sign of our discipleship. Love for others is the real symbol of our love for Christ. Jesus wants us to follow Him and imitate His loving ways. He wants us to understand that love is the most powerful thing in the world. He wants us to know that love makes all the difference in the world.

My sisters and brothers, think about our world today. The world's teeth are on edge watching the antics of Vladimir Putin, in Russia hunger for space and murder, men women children, elderly and of North Korea's "Little Kim" as he flexes his muscles threatening test launches of a nuclear missile in an effort to impress his generals and solidify his power all the while pushing the world dangerously close to nuclear war. A 28 year old scared little boy struts upon the world stage with his ridiculous 'Hitler haircut' has the world asking, what is North Korea going to do next? We pray he turns his swords into plowshares

and feeds his starving people, his sheep. So, what can we do. We must pray.

We must pray for peace. We must pray for peace.

So, my sisters and brothers of Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, how do we shine the light of Christ in a world frozen by fear, flawed by distrust and fractured by dissension at home and abroad, a world every day helplessly teetering on the edge of disaster? We must remember, this was the world of the 1st century, as well. It is the world the first disciples of Jesus faced. It is the world we face as 21st century disciples of Jesus. We cannot control or contain such chaos and lunacy. We can only control ourselves while remaining faithful coming to church every weekend and pray and come to your church in the breaking of the bread and to faithfully pray the prayers and living with one another in peace. Be a disciple, be a apostle and bring your family members to church, bring your friends to church, Bring your neighbors to your church, bring your co-workers to church. In prayer, we can only shine our light into the darkness. Only you can do this! Your prayers are powerful.

There are lots of “fish” we would like to cut loose from the net these days. Slit the net and let the ‘Little Kim’s, the Vladimir Putin of the world swim away. But look carefully, Jesus’ final “harvest” in John’s gospel does not let a single fish slip away from the net. Jesus’ invitation is to ALL nations, and ALL

“fish,” ALL persons, regardless of who they are, what they are or where they come from. As disciples that is our challenge. We can light up this dark and dangerous world by taking the resurrection light of Jesus everywhere we go.

In 2007, a movie came out with the great title, “P.S. I love you.” The gist of the film is that a young widow begins to receive letters from her dead husband, urging her to continue on with her life ending each letter with . . . “P.S. I love you.” The epilogue of John 21 is a “P.S. I love you” – to Peter, to John, to the all the generations of Jesus followers that followed them and those who will come in the future. Today, that P. S. I love you is from Jesus to all of us. Jesus says, “P.S. I love you” even when you don’t recognize my voice.

“P.S. I love you” even when you deny me in fear and bewilderment.

“P.S. I love you” even when you don’t let your light shine.

“P.S. I love you” no matter where in the pile of fish you find yourself.

“P.S. I love you” and walk with you and make a fire for you and feed you at dawn after a cold night at sea in a dark night of the soul.

“P.S. I love you” and showed you how much I loved you when I was crucified for you, when I died for you, and when I resurrected for you.

“P.S. I love you” because I created you and you are my most precious work of art.

Jesus says, “P.S. I love you” . . . my little fish. Let your light so shine upon

**this dark and dangerous world, so that all those who see your light by the way
you live your life will see my face, hear my voice, and be drawn into my
everlasting love. AMEN.**