

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, May 1, 2022

Text: John 21:1-19, "The miracle catch of fish"

Title: "I'm Going Fishing"

One way to look at our Gospel for today is through the lens of leadership. Jesus is looking for leaders to carry out his ministry after he ascends to the Father. And so far, the disciples are slow on the uptake. Keep in mind that this is Jesus' 3rd resurrection appearance in John's Gospel after Easter. Here in this fishing story, Jesus is calling his disciples, especially Peter, to lead in a new way.

Speaking of leaders, I took a red eye flight on Delta Airlines from Phoenix to Minneapolis early this morning. I experienced something I haven't before while boarding the plane. The captain spent some time going up and down the jet bridge welcoming us onto the plane. "Welcome aboard folks," he would say. Then when it came time to give the details of the flight, he stepped out of the cockpit among the people, got on the flight attendant's microphone, and explained the flight, the weather, and flight time while looking us in the eye... that it would be bumpy ride on take-off and landing due to a weather system over the Midwest. It was a very relational touch. And it was true... a very bumpy ride... but I was prepared and had less anxiety thanks to his leadership. Then prior to landing, the head flight attendant said, "Because of the turbulence, flight attendants will remain in their seats. We ask that on the honor system you put your seatbacks up and stow your tray tables." I felt empowered by the way she asked us to comply on the honor system. Good leadership is contagious.

In our Gospel, the disciples, who a week earlier were huddled in a locked room out of fear of the same thing happening to them that happened to Jesus, have now, at least, like Elvis, have left the building. Recall that Jesus just breathed on them the Holy Spirit, and Thomas got to see Jesus and touch his hands and side. They believed Jesus had risen... but weren't out there proclaiming it in the streets. Something was holding them back.

In fact, Peter and the disciples went back to what was familiar to them... to home and family on the Sea of Galilee. Where do you go when you are uncertain or afraid? In their uncertainty on how to move forward with Jesus' commandments to love and forgive, they went home. Peter said in our Gospel, "I'm going fishing... anyone want to come?" The disciples went with him and fished all night long. They were skunked... no fish. The fish must have moved from their regular spot. Plus, they perhaps were a little out of practice after following Jesus for 3 years. Something changed. Their old ways weren't working.

This is a metaphor for the church. I am afraid coming out of the pandemic that church is being called to fish other waters. We can't just snap our fingers, remove some Covid protocols, and expect everyone to show up again in our building. The fish have moved to different places. Going to church isn't as important. Some have moved online. Some aren't swimming near our nets anymore. We need to meet people where they're at. This might mean in small groups, in our neighborhood, on social media. In the Gospel, Jesus told the disciples to cast their nets on the right side of the boat. And in the midst of their doubt perhaps and exhaustion, they obeyed Jesus. I am not so sure I would have gone back out. By obeying, they were blessed with a miracle catch of fish. 153 to be exact.

So, in the midst of the disciple's failure earlier that night, the resurrected Jesus shows up on the beach and blesses them. Jesus met them in their exhaustion and failure. Jesus meets us there too. Jesus went to where the disciples were... the beach. Jesus even had a barbecue going and invited them for breakfast of fish and bread. He started with a ministry of presence... showing up... and then sharing a meal that they caught.

These are things the church can do. Have a beach ministry... right? But seriously, showing up where people are hurting and hungry and feeding them... with food and love. If it's on a beach... so be it. But we need to get creative. I am excited for our bike drive-in service this summer. Stay tuned.

After breakfast, Jesus asked Simon Peter, “Simon, Do you love me more than these?” What are these? The abundant catch of fish? The boats? His nets? His family? What are these for you? What is holding you back from diving deeper into your relationship with Jesus? What is keeping you from growing deeper in your faith? Our world competes for our attention and often gets it.

The one who denied Jesus three times is now being asked if he loves Jesus three times. It is almost as if Jesus is canceling out Peter’s three denials. And each time Peter says, “Yes... I love you.” Jesus says then, “Feed my sheep.” Sheep are a metaphor for us people. Then next ask Jesus says do you love me? “Tend my lambs.” In other words, care for the little ones. The most vulnerable among us.” A third time Jesus asks, “Do you love me?” Peter gets frustrated, “Feed my sheep.”

Jesus has grace for Peter. But Jesus is also looking for integrity and follow-through. Let your word be your word. After all, Peter promised Jesus earlier in the Gospel that he would never leave Jesus. He obviously broke that promise. But here we see grace upon grace for Peter and for us.

We too are called out of our love for Jesus and our baptism to feed Jesus’ sheep and tend his lambs. What does that mean for you and the church today?

But this won’t be easy. In the end of our Gospel for today, Jesus says to Simon Peter that following him will take you to some uncomfortable places... you will experience things out of your control.

But Jesus calls us nevertheless.

Amen