

3<sup>rd</sup> Sun of Easter (10Apr15)

John21:1-19; Rev5:11-4; Ac9:1-20; Ps30

The purpose of this reading—which I mentioned last week was a later postscript to the Gospel of John—could be seen as trying to set things right. Actually, the whole season of Easter could be seen as God’s ongoing effort to set things right, to overturn wrongs, to stop injustice through the ever-expanding Kingdom of God, to overcome death with life. Last week, that setting right focused on making sure sins are forgiven and that those who doubt and are uncertain are still welcomed and given what they need.

So what exactly is being set right in this week’s reading? Depending on the perspective, one view of the purpose for this section being added is either setting right or else turning unfortunate. This view observes that John’s Gospel is quite different from Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and that John promotes sharing of love in close-bound relationships, laying down our lives for each other as a beloved community. It could be that John’s congregation or set of followers had some different understanding, then, than the others who followed the Matthew-Mark-Luke synoptic-style of believers. Notably, in John’s Gospel Peter is much less central. He is more simply among the disciples rather than being their spokesperson. So maybe instead of a community of equals, this addition to John’s Gospel reinforces the other vision of Peter’s leadership, helping John’s group to integrate with the larger church by accepting this figure as central, who would become bishop of Rome, a role eventually enshrined in the hierarchy of the pope.

If that leaves you questioning whether this passage is actually setting something right or was accepting a less-ideal turn of history, we’ll move on to something more favorable: the location of this reading. Last week, we ended still behind locked doors in Jerusalem, but this

takes us back up north to the shores of the Sea of Galilee. It’s not only a more pleasant, pastoral place of scenery, but also a return home. It is a logical subsequent step of the story, because we have to wonder what happened next.

And that parallels our own story. On Easter Sunday, amid fresh lilies and the joys of bottled up Alleluias and crowds in worship and brass and rich, sweet treats, amid the newness of the thrill, it seems almost anybody could believe. It seems not too good to be true, but just good. It seems—maybe most of all—like a pleasant diversion. Then Easter passed and Monday came and you went back to work and normal rhythms and then school resumed and homework and what happens in these busy spring weeks, what decisions need to be made, chores accomplished, details taken care of, and you couldn’t ignore the election forever, and now are thinking about what comes next.

While the disciples weren’t worried about presidential primaries and the state supreme court, those original followers of Jesus and witnesses to resurrection also soon must’ve fallen out of the radical newness, the exciting disruption of Easter, and returned to the rhythms of life. This reading is setting straight that vital matter, that we can’t keep the after-effects of Easter locked up, but need to, must encounter them at home and amid the flow of our lives if they are true and consequential.

So the disciples went home and have gotten on with life. Maybe we’d wish Easter would’ve made more of a difference for them, more impact, that life just plain couldn’t be the same afterward. But we know this is actually how it works. We want Jesus to have shown up and changed everything, for God to be so lively and present and amazing that each moment of our lives would be imbued with a radiant glow and holiness so pervasive that we’d all don haloes like in the paintings and share so much love, peace, goodwill it would overcome all our problems and all evil. It would be nice, but

that's just not how it goes, at least in my experience. Instead life kind of goes on. Work goes on. We get busy with living our days and occupying our time and trying to make sense of our world and to do something that feels worthwhile.

In that way, the disciples went fishing. Not a bad choice for spending some time. But it also was indicating the three-year pilgrimage with Jesus had come to an end. Although John didn't tell the story of Jesus calling fishermen out of their boats to follow him, to "fish for people" as he says it in the other gospels, we can't help but hear this story as the bookend to that. They've given up on catching people and gone back to their boats, back to their nets, back to their old life.

We might be disappointed in that, wanting them to be doing something more special or powerful, to be permanently changed by their close encounter with God and time with Jesus. But as they go fishing, they seem to have moved on...or moved back. Maybe they're like the original college grads who have to move back into their parents' basement, after transformative experiences, with other opportunities not panning out, returning to the family business and same old way of life.

But then Jesus shows up on the shore. What will that mean? Last week he sent them on a mission; will he criticize them for goofing off, rebuke them for so soon neglecting their calling? Will he tell them they should be doing something more important than fishing, lecture them to take more seriously God, resurrection, and Easter?

Well, actually, in this encounter, Jesus seems less concerned with any of that. There's no proving himself with holes in his hands. He doesn't explain the Scriptures about suffering, dying, and rising. He doesn't seem motivated to share the peace or to breathe on them, giving them the Holy Spirit. He doesn't so much talk about forgiving sins or healing or

teaching. He doesn't reiterate a call away from fishing boats to catch people or even—for that matter—mention God.

Instead, Jesus essentially says, "I will make you fishers of fish." He tells them where to cast their nets so they can catch the lunkers, 153 fish all at once. And then he wants to have breakfast.

That is extremely important to tell in this story and is another thing being set right here, that is: following Jesus is not always about a call to forsake your old life and journey to a new strange way of being. It may be that for some, but for many—including, apparently, for much of this group of disciples, Jesus called them exactly to where they were, a calling to fish for fish and eat some brunch. In your calling and vocations, too, in your lives of work and engaging with family and the regular stuff at home, in your volunteering and all, a calling from Jesus is not necessarily more spectacular or glamorous or pious or rigorous, but may well be the blessing in your tasks as you already face them, and your skills already in use. It's the guidance of how to fish, so to speak, and sharing a meal, of his presence with you right where you are.

Peter may be the exception in this case. Jesus is repeating a call to him away from fishing, toward shepherding. With that is another occasion of setting things right, with the issue of love for God or Jesus. Do you love God? That's hard when you can't see God (as the letter of 1<sup>st</sup> John will explicitly remind us) (4:20). Peter may have loved Jesus, but he was running out of chances to show that devotion. Soon Jesus would be gone. What then? Well, Jesus sets it right by saying that your love, your devotion ought well be given to those who are there, to sisters and brothers you can see, to care for the lost and tend the hungry, meeting needs around you of those Jesus also loves. That's a good role, a worthy responsibility.

And in that particular calling, Jesus was also

setting something else right for Peter. This story is notably paired to reverse the events on the night of Jesus' arrest, when Peter was huddled at another charcoal fire and three times denied even knowing Jesus. Here, Jesus gave Peter the opportunity to undo his denial, to reclaim the relationship.

Now, for some of you, that may be extraordinarily good news, that you have a God of second chances, and third chances, and in this case fourth chances, and probably a lot more beyond that. It may be an amazing amount of grace, that no matter how much you feel you've strayed or done wrong or neglected God and faith and how you ought to be living that there's room for a fresh start.

That is, indeed, a central aspect of our faith, of repentance met by the embrace of forgiveness. We might even claim it's the Spirit that does this work in us, of warming our hearts, of turning our minds, of returning our feet and rejuvenating our lives.

Yet I also have to confess that I have discomfort if it depends on devotion, on my sustained vigor, on being able to stay interested, on how long our attention spans are. One of the most disheartening phrases I hear is when somebody who has been away from church for a time exclaims, "I'm not going to miss a week!" Mostly they don't even make it once. Or when they lose their goal of perfect attendance, then they feel like a failure and give up. Jesus may be ready to forgive 99 times, but what if I've only turned to repent 98 times? Even at three, Peter is aggravated, worn out on the process. How directly, how eagerly must we love for this to work out? Is it our responsibility to seize opportunities?

Sure, our God is able to restore Peter and set right his denial. Yes, our God is able to transform murderous terrifying Saul into missionary Paul, from persecutions into proclamation of life. Sorrow may last for the night but joy—indeed—come in the morning.

But we need a God who claims Peter during his denial, a God who embraces Saul even as he rebels, who puts up with Ananias refusing to heal, who doesn't just overlook our failures but loves us all the way through them, who doesn't give up on us when we ignore discipleship but will call us to fish for fish, who isn't looking for us somewhere else but right where we are, at home over breakfast, who isn't waiting for us to make amends or just encouraging us to mend our own brokenness, who is able to right our wrongs and to raise up our lives from the pit, bringing you also from death to new life, who is also there in sorrows and darkness and disappointment and death and redeeming it for us. We don't need just a process for restoration and reconciliation, nothing that is so easily explained or apparently routine, but somehow we even more need the Revelation of a wild unbelievable newness of a slaughtered Lamb ruling as King, and angels and chickens and myriad thousands of unexpected tongues and every last creature singing in praise: Alleluia! Christ is risen!