

## John 21:1-19

### Sent

What an interesting start to the story. Think about it. The disciples have recently gone through all kinds of experiences and emotions, from the highs of Palm Sunday to the intimate supper together with Jesus, the betrayal and death of Judas, and finally witnessed a trial in which their leader is sentenced to death by crucifixion. Jesus was crucified, buried, and then, the empty tomb. Since then, they have seen Jesus twice – resurrection appearances. How does one process all of that? Well for at least seven of the disciples it meant going back to do what they knew – fishing.

For those of you who fish, you well might think this was an appropriate thing to do. The water soothing, the task focused, while allowing time to think, to reflect, to just be. Yet it was a frustrating night as the men didn't catch a thing.

Think on times when you were faced with challenges that you didn't know how to work through or deal with. Emotions that were too overwhelming to just sit with. For many of us we turn to the things we know to busy ourselves. It is a coping mechanism and can be a healthy one at that, allowing us to process over time and get through things by doing what we already know and understand. It is often in doing things that we have revelations about our experiences and emotions. Both are needed, time to retreat and just get things done, and times to be still and reflect. Sometimes we are doing both in the same moment.

What is really the crux here is that the men are doing what they are doing, being who they are, getting through the day as best they can and Jesus meets them there, physically and emotionally. Jesus has met them at the seashore where they are, comes to them with a gift of abundance in the catch of fish, and a meal to feed them in all aspects of their being. His presence, again, a life giving, hope-filled moment.

Jesus has a meal of fish and bread ready and still asks for their fish. Now if we are to consider what this might mean for us in our Christian walk, might it be that Jesus can provide but also asks us to participate in the sustaining work. Hold onto that thought for a moment as we consider the conversation between Peter and Jesus.

There has always been said to be a correlation between the three questions Jesus asks Peter here and the three times Peter denied knowing Jesus on the night of the trial. It is a moment of forgiveness for Peter, even if a hurtful reminder of his weakness and fear during that time. And you have to think that this has not been far from Peter's mind. This conversation with Jesus is about the denial and more. It is also a moment of commissioning of sending. Jesus is setting Peter up as a forgiven, if wounded leader. One who will be able to take on the work that is before him. If Peter truly loves Jesus,

then he is to move on from what he is doing and do now what Jesus had been doing all along, feeding and tending to the needs of people.

Jesus refers to the people as sheep. Not as a derogatory term, but knowing that people like sheep need care, love, tending. One cannot read this part of John without recalling the words of Jesus from John chapter 10 where he refers to himself as the Good Shepherd, where he knows each sheep by name, he leads them, goes ahead of them and they follow because they know his voice.

Over the last few months Ken and I have had a young woman living with us that has lovingly been caring for a small flock of sheep. She has tended their wounds, fed them, nursed little lambs from dehydration and near death to life. She was just saying the other day that it is interesting how the sheep know her voice from all the others that may be around. They come to her. They trust her. She has tended to their physical well-being but that has also created a relationship that goes beyond the physical to the contentedness of the sheep. It also means mucking out the barn and the labour of stacking hay bails. Not all of the work is sweet, much of it is messy and dirty.

Now the relationship between Jesus and people is much more complex than that of Shepherd and sheep, but it is a starting place for understanding relationships of care, trust, and love. Jesus was calling Peter to that kind of relationship, one in which Jesus' love, care, compassion, and grace would be experienced through Peter. But remember Peter was not alone in that moment, there were six other disciples witnessing the conversation and it was the disciple Jesus loved who first recognized Jesus. Jesus met each of them where they were at physically, emotionally, even socially. Peter needed this conversation in order to go forward and all needed to hear it and see Jesus. All were being sent to do this same work.

Through their stories as witnessed to in the gospels, in Acts, and in the other letters written and passed through the generations to our time, known as the New Testament, we are given the same promise of restored relationship with God and each other through Christ. Yet, we are not to stop there but, from wherever we are and wherever we are in a given moment in our life's journey, we are given the invitation to be abundantly sustained by Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit, through our relationships with one another and God, through our worship, through communion - the means in which we are fed physically and spiritually – and through tending to the needs of others both within the community of faith, and definitely through tending to the needs of others who are yet to know about the love God has for each individual.

Know that Jesus will meet you where you are at. Not one of us interacts with the world the same, each of us has our own story of hurt, betrayal, success, witness, and faith. It doesn't matter that you and I are different in that from each other, and that each of us is different from all others. Jesus will meet you where you are at, but he won't leave you there, at least not if you are willing to trust and go beyond yourself in faith to participate in God's work in the world.

To be a Christian means to be sent out into the world, to not be satisfied with things as they are, but to be willing to go beyond our comfort zones and even our own understanding, trusting in the sustaining and abundant love of God and bring the love of Christ to others. If you recall, Jesus provided fish and bread for breakfast, but also asked for the contribution of the fruits of their labours through bringing more fish to the fire for breakfast. We have something to offer in who we are to the story of Jesus, of God's work, in the world.

Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit upon the followers of Christ in the first resurrection story, and that promise of the Holy Spirit is there for all believers. We are loved, forgiven, and given power to love and forgive others through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. We do it as individuals and we are certainly called to it as the church. We are called from who we are and from where we are...for God so loved the world. Amen.