

#22 15-16
Psalm 30
Acts 9:1-6
Revelation 5:11-14
John 21:1-19

Where Do We Go From Here?

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off. When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

This is just 5 verses shy of being the end of the Gospel of John, the last of the 4 Gospels. Here we have the telling of the third time Jesus appears with to the Disciples after his resurrection. He is standing at the shore at dawn while the 7 or so Disciples who had gone night fishing were in a boat, most likely frustrated after catching no fish. And he calls out to them to try something new. Isn't life like that sometimes? You do something one way for the longest time and it works just fine, and all of a sudden it doesn't anymore? Then some inspiration comes to you to shake things up a little bit, and voilà!

So Jesus is there, suggests something to bring them success, and then begins to prepare breakfast for the gang. It feels to me like they have had a long night, are tired, and maybe doing a lot of contemplating about the recent events and their experiences since meeting Jesus. I remember waking up early in the middle of the night to go fishing with my brother and my Dad. It was all so mystical to me as a child. Exciting, yet so calm. There was not much to do but to be with each other in peace and contemplate if the fish were going to like this hook or another; or should we troll a while, or cut the engine and sit. But by the time morning came and the sun had fully risen, it was as if some of the luxury was gone and we felt a need to get really serious about this task at hand. And when I hear this text I am reminded of those sacred moments fishing. And to imagine that at that moment, when the mystery and fun was starting leave the experience, Jesus was offering up a grand haul, and on top of it waiting on shore with a fire for breakfast! WOW! Just so real, so intimate.

Then, after breakfast, cozy enough to nap, Jesus slips in some meaningful conversation. He asks Peter if he loves him. Peter - the impulsive man of action, who has such great desire to please Jesus, and yet, found to his shame that he denied Jesus 3 times, just as Jesus said he would, and Peter was sure he would not . . . Peter is asked 3 times if he loved Jesus. And by the third time it says that Peter was hurt that he was asked 3 times, as though Jesus didn't believe him the first 2 times. Many scholars see this as Jesus giving Peter an opportunity to recover for each denial.

And on top of the questions of love, Jesus gives a commandment for each promise of love . . . "If you love me . . . feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep . . ." Which was a kind thing for Jesus to do, because Peter was a man of action and liked having specific things to do. These were men who needed to know what to do next, and Jesus came to them in a natural, caring way: feeding them, and asking them to feed others; tending to their needs, and asking to tend to the needs of others. It was almost as if the Disciples in the boat overnight were wondering, "where do we go from here?"

And this is when we get divine inspiration, when we are in a calm and natural state, united, contemplating with information and inspiration, and wondering how to serve others. Not when they were running around in fear and terror - as Peter was when he denied knowing the Galilean, but in the prayerful peaceful place of hope and communion.

Tomorrow will be the beginning of a new experience for us here at Hyattstown Christian Church. It is the day of assessment, when Roger McKinney comes to gather information and impressions, with the Hope that we will undergo a renewal of awareness and in time know where we go from here. It is as though today is the dawn and we haven't yet noticed the man on the shore, but WE know he is there and who he is already, and we are looking for him.

Suzanne Guthrie, upon contemplating this scripture, sees it in a wonderful, inspiring way:

Oh, Peter! So vulnerable, clueless, headstrong, weak-minded. I'm grateful for Peter's character. I could say "let's build three booths" or "wash all of me" or "I'll never deny thee!" I denied the Christ far more than three times, and yet I'd be just as hurt if I were asked, "Do you love me?" Meditating on these texts I once again realized I'm far more an admirer of Jesus than a follower. But Peter eventually rises to the apostolic opportunity and sets out upon the road of service and self-sacrifice.

She chooses quotes for her weakly meditation posts around the concept of getting a late start, keeping in mind Peter's process of "the three-fold denial and three-fold affirmation." Writing, "It's often true, isn't it, that God's power is made perfect in (our) weakness?" We often look for weaknesses in others, for whatever reason . . . habit, upbringing, defensiveness . . . but our scriptures are full of people with weaknesses and our faith is founded on the concept of turning them into moments of inspiration and grace. We need to catch ourselves when we begin to judge ~ and then stop ~ and throw the net out a different way - do something different ~ and wonder how to live differently ourselves so that we can be instruments of grace and therefore become witnesses to God's transformative powers.

Thomas Merton wrote:

A tree gives glory to God by being a tree. For in being what God means it to be it is obeying him. It "consents," so to speak, to his creative love. It is expressing an idea which is in God and which is not distinct from the essence of God, and therefore a tree imitates God by being a tree.

The more a tree is like itself, the more it is like him. If it tried to be like something else which it was never intended to be, it would be less like God and therefore it would give him less glory.

For me to be a saint means to be myself. Therefore the problem of sanctity and salvation is in fact the problem of finding out who I am and of discovering my true self. Trees and animals have no problem. God makes them what they are without consulting them, and they are perfectly satisfied.

With us it is different. God leaves us free to be whatever we like. We can be ourselves or not, as we please.

Thomas Merton 1915-1968, *The New Seeds of Contemplation*, quoted from Easter, Liturgy Training Publications, Easter

So where do we go from here? Striving to be most like our best, most sacred selves that we may please God, and that true self is defined best by our desire to love Christ better each day. Knowing our goal is to love Christ, follow Christ, not just to admire him but to act as he would . . . to feed his lambs, tend his sheep and feed his sheep . . . striving to accept new ways of doing things that we may hear God's will for us, this is where we start, where journey, where we travel every day of our lives.

May we all know our journey each day is accompanied by the love of God
and the support of this sacred community! AMEN