

WORSHIP

Sermon | 5.10.2020



Cast the Net Again

The Reverend Pen Peery

John 21

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 lake. 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 and 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.'

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Our second Scripture today is the story of another resurrection appearance following that first Easter.

In these weeks – and in this strange time...as we live through such change...a change we certainly don't even understand yet – in these weeks we are focusing on the ways that Christ's resurrection reframed life and the world for those first of Jesus' disciples...how resurrection became their new normal...and we are considering how living in light of Christ's resurrection might help guide us toward the new normal where we find ourselves.



One of the things I have noticed about all of these stories of resurrection is that – in every one – there is a mixture of feelings. We might expect there to be joy and happiness. But there is also fear. And shame. And disbelief. And worry.

I actually find that to be incredibly comforting – because it helps, I think, to know that it's not just as simple or as easy as having God's ultimate promise of good news erase the places in our lives where we feel uncertain or afraid. Resurrection is a reality that takes some getting used to. We shouldn't beat ourselves up if we forget how to align our lives by that promise from time to time...the first disciples had that struggle, too.

The passage I am going to read is from the gospel of John. It picks up after the place where Anna left off last week. The scene has shifted from Jerusalem back to Galilee. The disciples have come back to what was home. It's a long passage, but settle in and listen with me for God's word to us today.

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Last summer, while on vacation in the mountains (remember when we had vacations?) – a friend and member of our church who knew that I had never been fly fishing decided he would give me the chance to learn.

So he set me up with a fly-fishing guide, provided me some gear, and he let me fish a beat on a river that he helped to maintain. I thought – since I loved the movie *A River Runs Through It*, where the Presbyterian pastor is an avid fly fisherman – it would be easy.

I was there for the better part of three hours.

The guide was polite and very patient. He was amazingly good at getting my flies out of the various trees and bushes I managed to snare with my pitiful excuse for a cast.



Nice as he was, after our time was over with no fish, and...honestly...no real bites to speak of...when I told him I would enjoy trying it again sometime I just couldn't miss the sarcasm when he said, "sure...that'd be great."

Whether it's a once-a-year hobby, or a full-time job – anyone who has ever fished has learned the lesson of futility.

One reason why I have always loved this story from John's gospel is because I have great empathy for those disciples who spent the entire night on the Sea of Tiberius without anything to show for it.

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But that's not the only reason why I think this story resonates.

Peter and that handful of disciples were on the boat because they didn't know what else to do.

Not too long before, a few years maybe, they had dropped their nets and followed this teacher named Jesus. They left the fishing behind to strike out on a new kind of vocation – as followers of a man who promised to usher in a different world – a world full of promise and justice and peace.

They were captivated.

They had seen miracles.

Their lives and their hearts had been stretched to see a new vision of what was possible through the power of God.

And then...they were devastated.

Because their teacher had been betrayed.

And arrested.



And tried as a criminal.

And crucified.

While they knew about his resurrection, they also knew that in the midst of their dreams crashing down and in Jesus' most desperate need, they – specifically, Peter, had denied him.

After all of these things, Peter and those disciples were a mess. They had experienced the highest of highs and the lowest of lows. They had tasted hope. And they were well aware of their shame. They knew – with Jesus being raised from the dead – that the world could be different. But they also knew – as disciples – called to be committed, brave, and faithful – when the time came, they had been found wanting.

In light of their brokenness, what role could they now play in work that Jesus had started?

It's been said, when you don't know what to do, you go back to what you know.

So Peter and the disciples got in the boat and put out into the water.

Ashamed. Confused. Lost. Aimless.

They just went back to what they knew and hoped that life would go on.

I think most of us know something about that – that low-level sense of shame, the feeling of being lost, confused, just powering through the days hoping things will work out – I think we know something about that because a lot of us live that way a good deal of the time.

That is why this story is so powerful.

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They were there all night. Didn't catch a thing.



And then, at first light, just after the sun had come up but before they could make out who it was, a voice called from the shore.

“Children...”

The person on the shore knew of their failure.

“...you have no fish, have you?”

(He was talking about something bigger than fishing...)

And yet he also knew that failure didn't have to define them.

So he issued a new invitation, a new calling:

“Cast your nets again...”

Sometimes that can be one of the hardest things to do – to cast the net again.

I think about some of the people I have had the privilege to pastor...

Their marriage was on autopilot. The kids were out of the house, which served almost as a re-introduction for them – one to another. But it was hard to ignore the ways they had drifted over the years. It was hard to forget the words that had wounded in times of stress. Yet, there they were – with years...decades...ahead of them as a couple, wondering...can they can they cast the net again?

It started out as something she borrowed from the company that she intended to pay back. She thought she needed it – just to help her get through the month. But then one month became a lot more than one month, and the amount far exceeded her ability to make it right. When she was caught, the consequences impacted more than just her...it impacted her kids, her extended family, her friendships, her future. She could see it in their eyes – the betrayal, the disappointment, the lack of trust. She had paid the price and was now faced with starting over. Could she cast the net again?



I think about us – in our current situation...

As we live in the midst of this pandemic we are all experiencing many losses. Beyond the tragic loss of life, many of us are also experiencing the loss of things we've spent years...a lifetime, even...building up. A business. A book of clients. A well-honed model for how things would work that is now going to have to be completely re-thought because of the way the world has shifted on its axis due to the virus. When the time comes, we will cast the net again?

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“Cast your nets again,” the person on the shoreline said.
Sometimes that can be hard to do.
In life...and in the life of faith.

It can be hard – especially when things turn out differently than you thought they would – to cast the net again and put your trust in God.

It can be hard – when the faith you once had feels weathered and brittle and not as relevant as it used to – it can be hard to cast the net again and expect to find purpose.

And it can be hard – for those of us who are certain we don't deserve another chance because of what we have done, or what we have left undone – to cast the net again in the hopes of finding a relationship with the God of grace.

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Peter and disciples did it.



There was something about the person's voice that gave them confidence enough to try.

And it stretched their net to capacity. So full that they couldn't pull it aboard.

When Peter realized it was Jesus he did something that I've always found extremely strange. I'm not sure, exactly (nor do I really want to know) why he had his clothes off...but when he found himself in Jesus' presence he decides to put his clothes back on and jump in the lake.

For the longest time, I thought Peter just must have been excited.

But, actually, I think he – more than the other disciples – was ashamed.

Remember when Adam and Eve were in the garden – after they had eaten the forbidden fruit and had their eyes opened – and after they recognized that they were naked – how they covered themselves? That's the shame I think Peter felt.

Peter's net might have been filled, but his spirit was low.

So Jesus asked Peter, this disciple who had denied him three times in his greatest moment of need, Jesus asked Peter three questions...

...not to make him feel guilty

....or to test him

...but to reassure him – that in spite of the imperfect way that Peter had been a disciple, Jesus was still his savior and there was still work to do.

Peter, do you love me?

Do you love me?

Do you love me?

(Jesus knew that the answer was yes...)

Feed my sheep.

And so Peter did.



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My friends, we are living in uncertain times.
Times that are demanding.

Times that are and will require us all to adapt to changes we are just beginning to understand.

Times that will certainly test our resolve, our commitment to one another and our neighbors...our faith.

But let us remember...

That there are nets that still need to be cast.
And there are sheep that still need to be fed.

So let us listen for the voice along the shoreline...and have confidence that we have been made worthy to follow.

Amen.

