

The Third Sunday of Easter
St. John 21:1-19
May 6th, 2019
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

Go Fish

They didn't recognize Jesus right away as He stood on the beach watching them. This is true of most all of the Resurrection encounters with the risen Jesus. It is true today when we encounter Jesus in our own lives. We most often do not recognize Him. It is in hindsight that our mind's eye is opened and we realize what has happened to us.

The text does not say how long after the events in Jerusalem that some of the disciples were out trying to make a living fishing. But here they are. They have returned to the life they lived before they met Jesus. They are not successful after a whole night of hard labor. They are tired and frustrated. Has it been so long since they were fisherman that they lost their touch?

A stranger is standing on the beach watching them, perhaps a customer waiting to buy some fish, as often happens when fishing boats pull into shore. I worked on one as a teen up in Newport for my Uncle Norm. (Though I think you could say I was more 'in the way' than working!) When the fishing boat docked, there were a number of people looking to buy scallops and lobster and maybe a flounder, all fresh from the sea. I was reminded of this as I read this passage. But my Uncle, then in his early seventies, was always more lucky after a lifetime of fishing like this, and he almost always brought in a large catch, after starting between four or five in the morning. He would throw in his nets and go for at least two trawls, sometimes three, and then return to shore.

Imagine how tired and disappointed they are! Manually they threw their nets into the sea, trawled by hand, and then pulled the nets back up out of the water with their own brute force. At least my uncle had engines on his boat and winches to pull in his nets. They were exhausted and dispirited. Maybe they had lost their touch after the long hiatus traveling with Jesus around Israel.

Then this stranger says to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” “Cast the net to the right side of the boat and you will find some.” Who’s this guy calling them children? What did they have to lose? They did what the stranger said, and now they had so many fish, it was hard for them to pull the net into the boat.

A small thing this was. Was it a miracle? What ever it was, they recognize the still small voice of God in the midst of this. The first to recognize what is happening, the text says, that the disciple whom Jesus loved, maybe the one closest to Jesus, who knew the voice of Jesus best, became aware that this was the risen Lord. “It is the Lord, he exclaimed!” There were no bolts of lightning or peals thunder. No Hollywood stage lights brightening up to full power. Just the ordinary dawn sunlight seen everyday in the morning, newly risen on the sandy beach, just like the stranger who stood engaging them from shore. Blink and you might have missed the whole scene. Open your eyes, and you see something new at work, going on right in front of you.

Jesus is risen from the dead. Jesus is not in the tomb. Jesus still speaks to us by word of His Gospel, by seeing His actions, and guess what, sometimes through the mouths of others speaking truth to us, and even more, sometimes in God’s still small voice when all the noise in our lives comes to a halt and we listen. Silence, yet not quite silence, as we hear things we have never noticed were there before. We need to get ourselves out of our own way if we want to hear. Get the squishy earwax of all the stuff crammed into our daily lives out of your ears, and really listen.

So let me observe two key things going on in the text this morning. Perhaps you too can relate to them:

1. It would appear that not long after the resurrection, many of the disciples were already returning to the life they knew before meeting Jesus, they were already back to work in their boats, casting out their nets trying to make a living and moving on with their lives. This doesn’t mean that they were not moved by their experience with Jesus. They remembered his words. They would not soon forget them.
2. They returned to what they knew and were comfortable with. Why not? What else do you expect them to do? What would you do?

We get locked into living and doing in certain ways. We may not like the ritual we follow, but its familiarity brings us comfort, and so we return to it and follow it each day. It gives us a sense of stability and with that, safety

and security in an uncertain world around us. We follow these rituals (excuse my word) 'religiously,' even if they are waning and hardly working for us anymore.

Go Fish! Jesus proclaims! Try something new! When they cast their net out the other side of the boat, it was full to overflowing. Time to move on. Time to let go and let God into your life. Time to drop the burden that even that comforting shawl of a ritual brought you. Try a new way.

This is very true of every part of our lives.

- In our personal life, at work and at home. We follow our rituals, some good and healthy and some stress-producing and bad for us. Bad and harmful habits need to go, but often linger a long time, sometimes a lifetime. Maybe it is time to look at those rituals and answer the call of God to try something new...
- In our government. Do you really think one election will fix everything or preserve the ritual we have become accustomed to and feel safe with? No! It is time for a change, but change in people will hardly bring that about: a change in our ritual and the way we do things and relate to one another must happen. The harsh and bitter partisanship must come to an end and we must listen to each other and respect each other and work together to find solutions to our problems going forward. As Christians we must pray about how to do that. I believe it starts with really living the Gospel that Jesus taught us: Do unto others as you would have them do to you; and the new commandment he left us, love one another as I have loved you.
- In our church. We must listen for the voice and guidance of God. How would God want us to be ministers and fisherpeople in God's world in the twenty-first century? We must ask of our ritual, is it here to capture you? Or do we use it to try and capture God and hold onto God? If it's the latter, it will never work.

If you keep doing the same thing, what makes you think things are going to change? If you keep doing the same thing, you will get the same results.

It is time to Go Fish! Try something new. Cast the net out of the other side of the boat. Listen to the voice of Jesus calling you and calling us. AMEN