

Year C Easter 3 John 21 1 to 19

Peter very quickly takes center stage in this story. In his typical, headstrong, and impulsive behaviour, he jumps into the sea to rush to the side of his resurrected Lord and then is the object of Jesus' intense attention as Jesus grills him with the same question: Do you love me? Peter is meant to shine a light back onto Jesus and what Jesus is doing so that we have what we need in order to reap the intended benefits of John's story.

Simon Peter and the other disciples had already experienced Easter – they had already encountered the risen Jesus...living, breathing proof that he truly is the Messiah they had been waiting for and not just the Son of God but God in the flesh. They have witnessed, up close and personal, the most pivotal event in our salvation history. Today is the third time Jesus appears to them in his resurrection body. With this mind-blowing, earth-shattering knowledge and experience now a part of their lives, why on earth are they going fishing? They've lived through Easter and now they're going fishing – going back to the lives they had lived before they had become the close friends and disciples of Jesus of Nazareth. Now, before we “tut-tut” and shake our heads at this perplexing behaviour...going back to life as if nothing had happened, let's take a moment to realize that this perplexing behaviour is the exact same behaviour that the vast majority of Christians engage in after the events of Holy Week and Easter have passed. We eat the Last Supper with Jesus and his disciples, watch the betrayal of Judas, the denial of Peter, the blood-thirsty calls of the crowd to crucify, and witness the dying agony of our Lord on the cross. With joy we celebrate Jesus' new life on Easter morning and then, almost with a sigh of relief at the end of this emotional

roller coaster, we go back to life the way it was before Holy Week began...back to the “same old, same old”.

But we *are* different. Those disciples *are* different. All of us have just lived through the intensely emotional, life-changing lows and highs of the Passion of Jesus Christ, his death, and glorious resurrection so why are we just going fishing? Quite simply, the alternative to going ‘back to normal’ is to live differently...and that’s harder than it sounds. We can’t go backward to the time before we lived through these events and encountered the risen Christ but we don’t really know the way forward either. Jesus shows up today once more – for the third time – to help us move forward, to help us live differently, to *be* different.

The first thing we notice is that Jesus appears on the beach at sunrise and the disciples do not recognize him. This is the third time they’ve seen him since he was raised from the dead yet they don’t recognize him. There are, surely, many times when we don’t recognize Jesus among us but, make no mistake, Jesus is most certainly with us and he *does* help us to realize this. John clues in that it is Jesus speaking to them from the beach when, against the odds, they haul in an astounding amount of large fish just as the stranger said they would. “God makes all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (Rom.8.28) is what Paul writes in his letter to the Romans. But how do we know when we are being directed by God and not our own wills? That will always be a tough question but today’s story does provide some help. Jesus calls the disciples, “Children” – a very strange term for a grown man to be using to refer to more grown men. “Children” is an affectionate term that Jesus has used in the past to refer to his disciples because he is their teacher

and friend. So, the voice that we hear will be loving, familiar. The voice might guide us, like today, into the revelation of God's abundant provision, but it will always guide us into building up, always bring us closer to the fulfillment of God's purpose of the reconciliation of people and planet with God and with each other.

Peter's reconciliation with God is front and centre in this story and guides our understanding of what Jesus is asking us to do in order to live differently. John deliberately mentions that Jesus is on the beach cooking over a charcoal fire because it was while warming himself by a charcoal fire that Peter denies, three times, even knowing Jesus. After this devastating personal failure, Peter is gently but persistently brought back into relationship with Jesus through the repeated profession of his love...one declaration of love for each of the three denials. God is determined to bring each of us into relationship with him, with each other, and with the rest of his good creation. Each person, like Peter today, who turns to God and is reconciled with God is given an extremely important task: Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep.

The task of 'good shepherding' has been passed on to us. The love that we experience and learn from God is to be directed to the world around us. We are to nurture and care for all others and creation, to work with God to bring the world ever closer to the fulfillment of God's purpose. And we do this at the direction of the voice of Jesus but without Jesus physically present with us. John shows us today that we are very capable of doing this. In contrast to Luke's story in which this miraculous catch happens with Jesus in the boat, John shows us that the disciples hear Jesus's voice but then accomplish the task without his physical presence with them. This story is all about *doing*. We hear the voice of Christ, and

are guided by the voice of Christ, and we then are able to accomplish the tasks he sets for us. *Being* different means *living* differently and living differently means building up.

It is the building up of equality and peace through speaking out and doing justice. It is the building up of the planet...conserving, recycling, educating. It is the building up of individuals through kindness and compassion and forgiveness. It is the building up of the body of Christ through radical hospitality and inclusion. The disciples are different today and so are we. This experience of Holy Week and Easter is an obvious big deal in our Christian lives but it is not the only big deal. Every single time we encounter God – in Scripture, in prayer, in gathering for worship, and in the breaking of bread – every single time we encounter God, we are never the same afterward. We must take the time to ask: “What did I learn?”, “What did I feel?”, “How will I show this in my life after today?” Taking the time to notice how we are different will allow this “being different” to soak into our bones. And when being different soaks into our bones, we *will* live differently. We have seen how Jesus lived differently – generously offering love and forgiveness, healing and welcome. That is now our task...feed my sheep, he says. It may not always be a task we want. Like Peter, we may have a belt put around our waist leading us where we do not want to go. It is not easy to live differently but each one of us *has* heard Jesus’ voice today and that voice said, “Follow me.”