

“Risen Lord. Now What?”

**First Presbyterian Church
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May 5, 2019**

Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 58:6-9

New Testament Lesson: John 21:1-14

Three little boys were debating whose mom was the most loving. The first little boy said: “My mommy loves me because I gave her a quarter, but she gave it back, saying, ‘Go and buy a piece of candy.’” The second little boy argued that his mother loved him more because “If I give her a quarter, she gives me back two quarters for two pieces of candy.” The third little boy, seeing the direction this was going, scratched his head and said, “Well, my mom loves me more because she would keep the quarter, and then tell me how much that quarter will help her pay the bills.”¹

In that exchange between three little boys, where do you suppose Jesus showed up most fully? With the boy who understood what love really is, right, the love of a mother who knows how to value the gift of her son, by putting his gift to use in feeding the family? That’s what Jesus is showing us. Put your gifts to use in feeding the family – that is, caring for other people – and leading others to do the same. We see that in today’s appearance of the Risen Lord in our New Testament lesson from John.

Peter, and James and John (the sons of Zebedee) are fishing along with four other disciples, just like they were three years earlier when they left their nets behind to follow Jesus in his earthly ministry.

John tells us that “Jesus showed himself again to his disciples” – after he had appeared to them in the Upper Room. Remember, that’s where Jesus allowed Thomas to touch the nail holes of his crucifixion, and thus, instilled belief in the most doubting disciple on earth, doubting Thomas.

So today’s appearance at the Sea of Tiberias, also known as the Sea of Galilee, is not to instill belief. Jesus had already done that. No, this appearance is to teach and remind them what it is to be a follower of the Risen Lord, something we all need to be taught and reminded. Jesus is showing them – and us – how belief in the Risen Lord should be applied in our day-to-day lives.

¹ **Thanks to Bob Dees, Campus Minister, University of Alabama.**

This is an important lesson, because we all face way too many choices each day – choices about how we spend our money, time and talents, how we give of ourselves.

Do we give to everyone who begs of us, do we say “yes” to everyone who asks of us, do we stop and listen to everyone who wants to take a moment of our time – maybe a child in your family or at church, a colleague at work or a friend from school, a stranger on the street corner.

We can't possible give of ourselves – our time, talents and treasures – to everyone who asks. So, how do we live in the Spirit and teachings of the Risen Lord? Sometimes it just seems impossible.

In his book *The Purpose-Driven Life*, Pastor Rick Warren agrees. He writes, “It is impossible to do everything people want you to do. You have just enough time to do God’s will. If you can’t get it all done, it means you’re trying to do more than God intended you to do ... (or, possibly,” he says, “you’re watching too much television).”²

But here in the Bible, we have the final face-to-face encounter between the disciples and the Risen Lord. Surly it helps point us to what’s truly important in life. So, let’s take a look. John tell us it was just after daybreak and “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.”

This means that the disciples have been working all night long and have caught nothing – no fish to eat for themselves, and no fish to sell so they can put a roof over the heads of their loved ones. Remember, they had left everything to follow Jesus. And now, after his crucifixion, they have been discredited and left to fend for themselves.

Yet they are not alone. Jesus is still with them. Jesus will teach them how to live without such worries. Jesus teaches each of us how to live less worrisome lives, even amid our need to put food on the table, deal with our over-programmed schedules, and find our way in a world of twists and turns, lies and deceptions.

Jesus sees how hungry the disciples are, so he says to them, “‘Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some (fish).’ So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish.”

² Warren, Rick. *The Purpose-Driven Life*, page 31.

Here, the disciples are reminded of their original calling, when Jesus said he would make them fishers of people, for the sake of the Gospel and all that it promises us and our world.

How do we respond to such a calling, to be fishers of people for the sake of the Gospel? When we are tired from a long day's – or night's – work, would we even recognize Jesus if he came alongside us, spoke directly to you, to me?

When we are feeling like the disciples did after Jesus' crucifixion –overwhelmed by anxiety, grief or fear – don't we all struggle seeing our way forward toward a better, more fulfilling tomorrow?

Sometimes the answer is getting out – getting out of your own head where you feel trapped by worry and despair – and going somewhere new. Phone a friend, take a walk, explore the world around you, allow someone else to energize you, find a fresh outlet for your gifts and talents.

That's what Peter did after the crucifixion, when he was gripped by anxiety, grief and fear. He went fishing with his friends. And though they didn't catch any fish that whole time, they caught something much greater. They caught a glimpse of the Risen Lord.

And boy, did that energize Peter! When John said to Peter, "It is the Lord! ..., Peter ... jumped into the lake," splashing and running his way toward Jesus. He did it again, he left everything behind to be with Jesus, even his anxiety and fear. Just left it behind.

And then, the other disciples catch up with Peter, "dragging the net full of fish..." – more fish than they could count, though they counted every one of them like a blessing straight from God, 153 large fish.

Getting out of your own head and stopping to count your blessings – it's a great way to recenter yourself on what's truly important in life, which Jesus is about to show us on the lakeshore.

On the lakeshore, Jesus says to the disciples, "Come and have breakfast." Then, "Jesus ... (takes) the bread and (gives) it to them, and (he does) the same with the fish." Jesus gathers the disciples – gathers us – into a holy community, alongside one another, around the Lord's table, the Lord's Supper today. From this place, at this moment in time, we know what's truly important in life. "Feed my lambs..., care for my sheep, feed my sheep. ... Follow me." Those are the words from our Prayer of Confession today. Those are the words Jesus will say to Peter – and to us – in the very next scene after today's scripture reading.

Those are Jesus' final instructions, according to John, given to us before Jesus returned to heaven to send his Spirit to guide us, care for us, and empower us in ministry. As we are gathered here today around the Lord's table, we too, are nourished body and soul, energized for ministry, instructed and inspired to care for others in the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

That is what is truly important in life – taking care of one another.

What might be one caring act that you could do this day, this week in the Spirit of Jesus Christ? Think about it. If we are mindful of that calling, even as we go about our ordinary lives, Jesus will appear to us and entrust to us his ministry here on earth, even in our most ordinary moments in life. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Mighty God of mercy, in the season of Easter joy, we thank you for the resurrection dawn, bringing the glory of our risen Lord, who makes every day new.

Especially we thank you for the beauty of your creation. And the new creation in Christ that brings healing and forgiveness.

We pray your healing touch upon all those we've held in prayer these recent weeks.

We thank you for the sustaining love of family and friends and the fellowship of faith in your great church.

Guide us in ministry alongside you and one another, through the Spirit and teachings of Jesus Christ, who taught us to raise our eyes to heaven and our voices in prayer, singing:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**