



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

April 8, 2018

Unfinished Business

Rev. Louise Rogers

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Printed in the United States of America

First Printing: April 10, 2018

John 21

21 After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. ² Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin,^[a] Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. ³ 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.

⁴ Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” They answered him, “No.” ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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^[b] off.

⁹When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. ¹⁰Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” ¹¹So 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. ¹²Jesus 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. ¹³Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Jesus and Peter

¹⁵When 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.” ¹⁶A 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.” ¹⁷He 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. ¹⁸Very 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.” ¹⁹(He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, “Follow me.”

Next Saturday is a holiday in our family. This is not a holiday celebrated by everyone or found on most calendars but I assure you in my extended family this is a high and holy day, actually a weekend; the opening day of trout fishing. While women and men are both equally talented in fishing, in our family it is the men who go off to the cabin by Seven Springs for a weekend of fishing. Preparations are quite involved, first they must decide what they will eat the drink for the weekend- they do not eat the fish they catch. Next comes the preparations for the fishing: Fishing license-check, fishing rods- check, check; then the important debate: Live bait or artificial. If artificial bait is chosen will they use spinners or flies- the discussion about flies is extensive. Yes fishing is a wonderful past time. Fishing is an ancient art.

When the men of Jesus' day went fishing they didn't go for recreation they returned to the sea, to what was familiar, to make a living. This was Monday morning for Peter, James and John and the other disciples. Jesus is gone now – Yes they had a great run for three years witnessing miracles, amazing teaching and love in action culminating with Jesus at the Passover just a few days earlier. The triumphal entry seemed so promising but all their hopes crumbled with the arrest of Jesus, his painful death, resurrection, even a sighting of Jesus - now confusion. How could they process all of this? They go fishing!

One of them, Peter hauls in the nets all night but he is carrying more than the nets, he possesses a heavy heart recalling the broken friendship with Jesus. Filled with bravado, many times Peter had made his brave declaration of loyalty to Jesus, “Everyone else may stumble, but I will

not.” (Mat 26: 33) Then came his moment of truth...the clanking of the Roman guard, the flash of a sword, and soldiers leading Jesus away. Peter found himself standing alone before a small fire in the courtyard when an innocent girl recognized him. “I saw you, you were with him!” “I don’t even know him!” came the denial. So now Peter has escaped to Galilee, yet his heart is miles away remembering and regretting all that had taken place. Easter has come but Peter still has unfinished business with the Lord.

We know...you can move the hands of a clock forward and backward but we cannot move the events of the past. Regrets strangles hope and spiritually chokes the way to new life. Could have, should have, would have, create a vicious cycle. The longer we stay here recreating what happened before; we are caught in a whirlpool of longing and despair. We connect with Peter because we too carry our own sack of regret and disappointments. While we may be quick to forgive others, forgiveness for ourselves is so often a harder journey. Peter stands brokenhearted in the darkness in the boat on the sea.

Suddenly just before dawn a voice calls out. Have you caught anything? **Cast your nets on the other side.** Begrudgingly, the disciples go along; after all, these are seasoned fishermen who have been at work all night long. But their catch that day nets 153 fish. Even to modern day fishermen this is extraordinary, even miraculous. Immediately, Peter knows the voice is Jesus. Grace is found in 153 fish. He leaps out of the boat to shore as his heart begins to mend.

Just as Jesus met the disciples in the ordinary places of their life so even today Jesus still meets us in the ordinary places. Jesus comes not as the exalted victor over heaven and earth who has conquered sin and death, but as Jesus the grace giver. Jesus came for his friends, and then cooks a meal in that ordinary place, stays with them because this is precisely where they need him the most. As the Psalmist says “Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.” In being a Christian, a follower of the Lord, all of our problems don’t disappear. We learn as we commit our way to Him that the Lord goes with us in our troubles, challenges, heartbreaks and in the fullness of time ultimately can turn even our mourning into dancing as we experience the presence of the Lord.

The entire gospel of John is about God’s abundant grace, the undeserved love and mercy of God poured out for us. Some make an acronym out of the word: **Gods Riches At Christ’s Expense**. At the beginning of the gospel the writer says, Jesus was, “Grace upon grace” (John 1:16) but after the Prologue, the word grace never appears. Why? John is showing us living grace in Jesus the one who we can see, and hear? In him we learn how to receive the grace in our life and then to share the grace with each other in concrete ways. To show in miracles and even by a ridiculous amount of fish, that God’s grace extends through the incarnation, to the crucifixion, to the tomb, to the resurrection and to us in the Holy Spirit today.

The miracle of the fish proved that despite all of Peter’s failings, Jesus was still on his side. Now Peter and Jesus stand over a small charcoal fire to remove old memories. The invitation to him to affirm his love three times

drowns out the echoes of his betrayal that haunts him. Peter had to be reminded three times of Jesus' unconditional and amazing love despite everything. He now will begin to step out in faith as Peter becomes the Rock upon which the Church will be built. When we feel unworthy or unsuitable or too sinful to be accepted by the Lord...know this, the risen Christ still calls, still feeds, still empowers even doubters and deniers for the ministry.

Where is Jesus calling us to cast our nets today? Henri Nouwen, the theologian and spiritual teacher helps us in our quest. He gives us questions we can take to God in prayer at the end of the day as we seek to draw closer to the Lord.

Did I offer peace today?

Did I bring a smile to someone's face?

Did I say words of encouragement?

Did I say words of healing?

Did I let go of my anger and resentment?

Did I forgive?

Did I love?

These are the real questions...Transformation begins slowly one step, one person, one day at a time with the power of the Spirit.

On the seashore of Galilee is a statue of Peter and Jesus which stands at the traditional sight of the breakfast. I took this picture when I traveled there with the group from Westminster in 2016. Here we see a blessing and a commissioning. Jesus does know everything about us and still comes to us with forgiveness and blessings for us, even commissions us to live in the new life empowered by the Lord. We move forward when we bring our regrets to receive the gracious forgiveness of God. God isn't finished with us, abundant mercy pours down for each of us. God knows and opens his arms wide for each of us. Amen.





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