

**Sermon, Third Sunday after Easter, Year C, Jane A. Beebe, May 5, 2019**

‘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 fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast."' (John 21:9-12)

The post-resurrection stories we are hearing post-Resurrection are quite wondrous. Last week, Jesus appears among the disciples *through locked doors*, bringing peace and the presence of the Holy Spirit. This week he meets the hard-working disciples on the shore, reorienting them, and calling them ever-deeper into discipleship. We heard a similar fishing story from the Gospel of Luke during the season of Epiphany. Today’s story from John comes to us in the season of Easter; it contains quite different details. Jesus does not get into the boat with the disciples; he waits for them on the shore. This time, rather than encouraging the disciples to put out in deep water, he suggests simply fishing from the other side of the boat. Being willing to let go of fear and enter the deeps is one aspect of faith. Here, Jesus seems to be inviting the disciples—and us—to look in another direction, even when our nets are, as yet, empty.

As in the story from Luke, Peter and several of the other disciples take out their boat to fish all night. They are engaging in familiar work, the work they have always done. Perhaps we can imagine that they have not yet thrown off the terror and grief of Holy Week. Familiar activity may be reassuring, grounding. They take

the advice of the apparent stranger on the shore and let down their nets on the other side of the boat. Once again, the catch is abundant—yet this time with the detail that the net is *not* torn. We are even told the exact number of fish that were caught: 153! The “beloved” disciple finally recognizes that it is Jesus who has spoken to them. The abundant catch is a pretty big clue to who has come near. Peter is so overwhelmed at Jesus’ presence he jumps in the water!

It is becoming apparent to Jesus’ disciples that the resurrection is not the end of the story: it is a new beginning. It is a new morning. Jesus is not only alive, Jesus continues to teach his followers, to call them on, to lead them deeper into discipleship. In one of the lovelier conversations Jesus has with one of his disciples, Jesus asks Peter three times, “Do you love me?” It is clear that Peter finds this heart-wrenching. Jesus’ response is to call Peter into a new role. The sheep that Jesus has gathered are given into Peter’s care. “Feed my sheep.” “Feed my lambs.” Care for young and old, all who know my voice. What Jesus asks of Peter is an echo of Jesus’ “new commandment” heard earlier in John: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” (John 13:34) Then, wonderfully, Jesus shares grilled fish and bread with his friends. This is the post-resurrection Eucharist: Jesus is alive, on the shore, waiting for us. As it says in our Psalm today, “Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.” (Psalm 30:5)

One of my favorite Anglican theologians is Julian of Norwich. Her feast day is coming up on May 8, so she has been in my mind this week. One of my favorite passages in Julian of Norwich's *Showings*, the account of her series of visions, is the story of the fallen servant beginning in chapter 51 of her text. For me it illustrates how Peter is drawn out of his despair at betraying Jesus to his becoming the solid foundation for the Church Jesus intended. At the beginning of the story a lord gives a servant a task to perform. (Julian uses the language of medieval chivalry for her allegory.) The servant is eager to do well and runs off to do the lord's will. Inevitably, in his haste, the servant falls into a dell.

In the dell the servant suffers physically, emotionally, and spiritually, unable to do anything on his own behalf to save himself. Worst of all, the servant is unable to see a savior is at hand. Like the disciples that find no fish at first, the servant does not know where to turn. Julian observes, "...The greatest hurt which I saw him in was lack of consolation, for he could not turn his face to look on his loving lord, who was very close to him, in whom is all consolation..." With a compassion that is rooted in her love for Christ, Julian sees no fault in the servant. It is revealed to her that "... [the lord's] beloved servant... should be... rewarded forever, above what he would have been if he had not fallen..."

Simply and hospitably, Jesus says, "Come and have breakfast." This has led me to contemplate kitchens I have known. My mother enjoyed doing embroidery,

and for many years one of her creations hung in our kitchen. It had a quotation from Thoreau: “Only that day dawns to which we are awake.” It’s a bit challenging existentially. If I am not awake, will the day dawn? Such responsibility! There is more to Thoreau’s quotation: “There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star.” Isn’t that what Jesus is showing his disciples? “There is more day to dawn.” They have come through the night; they are safely on shore. They are invited to follow—this time the risen Lord.

One of the loveliest Christmas presents I received this year was a jar of home-made raspberry jam. The raspberries were home-grown. I carefully hoarded this treasure through the winter. This week I ate the last of it on my morning toast. We’ve had some gloomy, chilly weather in recent days. Something about the wonderfully intense taste of the jam brought light and warmth back into my day. It brought me back to myself, it woke me up: a small resurrection moment. There is a lovely hymn called “New Every Morning Is the Love.” It appears in our hymnal with a rather odd tune or I would have chosen it for this morning. This is the 18<sup>th</sup>-century tune by Samuel Webbe I remember:

“New every morning is the love  
our wakening and uprising prove;  
through sleep and darkness safely brought,  
restored to life and power and thought.

New mercies, each returning day,  
hover around us while we pray;

new perils past, new sins forgiven,  
new thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven.

If on our daily course our mind  
be set to hallow all we find,  
new treasures still, of countless price,  
God will provide for sacrifice.

The trivial round, the common task,  
will furnish all we need to ask,  
room to deny ourselves, a road  
to bring us daily nearer God.”