

Sunday, May 1, 2022 – “Resurrection Work”
– Bible Study & Reflection on John 21:1-19

Dear Members & Friends:

I invite you to read the following passage from John 21:1-19 (*Common English Bible*).

¹Later, Jesus himself appeared again to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. This is how it happened: ²Simon Peter, Thomas (called the twin), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, Zebedee’s sons, and two other disciples were together. ³Simon Peter told them, “I’m going fishing.”

They said, “We’ll go with you.” They set out in a boat, but throughout the night they caught nothing. ⁴Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples didn’t realize it was Jesus.

⁵Jesus called to them, “Children, have you caught anything to eat?”

They answered him, “No.”

⁶He said, “Cast your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.”

So they did, and there were so many fish that they couldn’t haul in the net. ⁷Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It’s the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard it was the Lord, he wrapped his coat around himself (for he was naked) and jumped into the water. ⁸The other disciples followed in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they weren’t far from shore, only about one hundred yards.

⁹When they landed, they saw a fire there, with fish on it, and some bread. ¹⁰Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you’ve just caught.” ¹¹Simon Peter got up and pulled the net to shore. It was full of large fish, one hundred fifty-three of them. Yet the net hadn’t torn, even with so many fish. ¹²Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples could bring themselves to ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. ¹³Jesus came, took the bread, and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish. ¹⁴This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

¹⁵When they finished eating, Jesus asked Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

Simon replied, “Yes, Lord, you know I love you.”

Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” ¹⁶Jesus asked a second time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

Simon replied, “Yes, Lord, you know I love you.”

Jesus said to him, “Take care of my sheep.” ¹⁷Jesus asked a third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was sad that Jesus asked him a third time, “Do you love me?” He replied, “Lord, you know everything; you know I love you.”

Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. ¹⁸I assure you that when you were younger you tied your own belt and walked around wherever you wanted. When you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and another will tie your belt and lead you where you don’t want to go.” ¹⁹He said this to show the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. After saying this, Jesus said to Peter, “Follow me.”

In these Sundays of Eastertide, the lectionary gives the Church the opportunity to explore the significance of the amazing gospel declaration, “He is risen! Risen indeed!”

Our Gospel for this Sunday is a vivid story from the Fourth Gospel that is set (unlike Luke’s

fishing story, Luke 5:1-11) in the period **after** the resurrection event. John portrays Simon, Thomas, Nathanael, Zebedee's sons, and two other disciples fishing in the Sea of Galilee (also known as the Sea of Tiberias or Lake Tiberias – John 21:12). These are the disciples who witnessed firsthand the crucifixion of Jesus, the ones to whom the Risen Christ appeared when they huddled behind locked doors (last Sunday's Gospel). And yet, they have gone back to work, back to doing the same (dull?) jobs that occupied them before they met Jesus.

This is the third of John's resurrection appearance stories (It's actually the fourth appearance to his disciples, if one counts Mary Magdalene as a disciple). John's entire Gospel has been characterized by some as a long Easter sermon from start to finish. In the Fourth Gospel, one doesn't have to wait until the end for resurrection. It's as if Christ is the exalted, resurrected Lord from the first verse. John 1 introduces Jesus, not as the lowly crucified rabbi but as One who was with God, who was God from the beginning, having a hand in the creation and sustaining of the world.

Jesus' first "sign" (John 2) is turning water into wine at the wedding at Cana, significantly, on "the third day." When the wine gave out and there was no hope for replenishment, Jesus performs a miraculous transformation, and there is a huge overflowing of better wine than was present before. Surely this story is intended by John as a hint of the coming resurrection. From death and drought comes refreshment and abundance. That's what happens to Jesus on "the third day" in the resurrection event.

And now John gives us a story of a dark night of fishing failure that is interrupted, transformed by Jesus into a story of great abundance. When the disciples dare to do what Jesus tells them to do, to lay aside their own failures and frustrations and cast their nets on the other side of the boat, there is success, abundance and new possibility.

Isn't that true in our own lives? We often take on a task, work hard on it, only to have it fail miserably. But when we reevaluate our failure and look at it through the eyes of faith, it turns out only to be a setback. Try, try again! That's also true of going to church or trying new things to meet the diverse needs within a congregation. One of our church members recently said to me, "We go to church to get the right perspective so that we can change the path that we're on. Sometimes we need guidance. We're looking for wisdom that we may not have seen before and that will help us redirect our life's path."

Look at Jesus' life and mission. If we only viewed Jesus' ministry up to Good Friday, we could say that his ministry was a failure. But we look at the whole picture of Jesus' ministry, including the resurrection good news: The tomb is empty. He has risen as he said he would.

And yet, there's more. The "more" is the disciples' vocation, their work, their mission after the resurrection. They are continuing Jesus' work, his ministry. The first words these disciples heard from Jesus were "follow me." Now Jesus repeats his call to them. Stories of vocation, summons, commissioning, mission, work thus serve as bookends in the Fourth Gospel. The Risen Christ does what Jesus the teacher did; ordinary laborers are called to "follow me," putting them to work for Jesus.

Just like Luke's fishing story, John's story is also a call story, a story of vocation, sort of. As with many other appearance stories, the disciples do not recognize Jesus at first. Still, they obey the

stranger on the shore and go back for one more try at fishing. Every fisher understands this story. There's always that big one that didn't quite get hooked or slipped and flipped out of the net. But this time, the disciples' nets overflowed. One hundred and fifty-three fish are hauled in (John 21:11). Why on earth are we given the exact count of fish? Perhaps it is simply to be taken as a huge number.

Surely the lectionary (at this time) has vocation in mind in pairing John 21 with Acts 9, the call of Saul to be the great missionary to the Gentiles. Notice I did not say the "conversion" of Saul. It's important to characterize Acts 9 not as the "conversion of Saul." Saul was already quite happily Jewish. Saul is called (this vocation story seems quite clearly crafted to be like other biblical call stories – Moses, Samuel – for instance) in order to be given a job by the Risen Christ. Christ appears to Saul – Church Enemy Number One – in order to transform him through vocation into Chief Church Planter and Missionary to the Gentiles. He is now called to be the "Apostle" Paul.

Thus, this Sunday's Gospel and Acts lessons offer a rich opportunity to consider a continuing resurrection truth: the Risen Christ shows up among us in order to call us to come forth and be part of his resurrection work.

Continuing Eastertide Blessings!

Pastor Greg Rupright