

Wake
From Resurrection to Pentecost

Our story this week is really part of the larger story that we began talking about last Sunday. The disciples, not knowing what else to do, had decided to go to fishing (i.e. Sonic) and though they were out all night they had come up empty. Then this stranger on the shore, after rubbing it in that they hadn't caught anything, tells them to cast their net on the other side of the boat. They do, and miraculously enough, they end up filling their net up to the brim with fish. After one of the disciples recognizes it's Jesus, Peter jumps overboard and swims to the savior. The rest of the disciples make it to the shore and discover that Jesus is sitting around a charcoal fire, preparing a breakfast of fish and bread, which of course would have reminded them not only of how much Jesus loved and cared for them, but also of the miracle that Jesus had done long ago when he turned 5 loaves and 2 fish into enough to feed thousands.

And it is as this breakfast is finishing up, as the dishes are being put away, the trash thrown into the fire, that Jesus begins this quiet conversation with Peter. And in many ways this conversation is nice and straightforward. Jesus asks Peter if he loves him. "Yes, Lord; you know I love you" Peter says. "Then feed my sheep." Again Jesus asks him if he loves him, again Peter says yes and again Jesus tell him to feed his sheep or lambs. A third time Jesus ask Peter if he loves him and, not surprisingly, Peter is somewhat hurt by Jesus' asking yet again about his love, but he answers again that of course he loves him. To which Jesus, for a third time, says "Feed my sheep."

When scholars look over this text they see it as a commissioning of Peter or a call to discipleship. There is a clear picture in this passage, as we see elsewhere in scripture, that if you love Jesus, if you follow him, if you are a disciple, that you respond to this love by obeying him. And this includes feeding Christ's sheep, caring for others, reaching out to God's children. In other words, if we say that we love Jesus, then this love results in a call to action.

Now that should not be a foreign concept to anyone who has been at ZPC for any amount of time, nor should it catch our 6th grade inquirers by surprise. This fits very neatly into the 6 marks of discipleship that ZPC has championed through much of its' life and that our youth inquirers have learned so well in this past year. It is out of our love for Jesus and obedience to him that we develop hearts for Christ alone, knees for prayer, minds transformed by the Word, voices to speak the good news, arms of love and spirits of servanthood and stewardship. This is a key aspect of what it means to be disciples, to follow Jesus, and this conversation between Peter and Jesus gives us a vivid picture of this reality.

Now it would be easy at this point to say alright 6 graders, get up here, answer these membership questions and go out and feed Christ's sheep. But before we jump to action it is important that we also see what *else* is going on in this scene, something that may not immediately jump out to us, but something that would have been abundantly clear to Peter.

When I was one year younger than you 6th graders I lived near Seattle, Washington. I had a great teacher, Mr. Fein, who took us on lots of field trips, read *The Hobbit* to us, and who allowed us to play a lot of games like Chess and Stratego, during lunch. One day during lunch I was playing Stratego and was, not surprisingly, crushing my opponent Josh Maynard. All of a sudden Josh got angry and so he threw the board up in disgust sending the pieces everywhere. One of them hit my eye and, for a budding young man, that was not an action that could go unpunished. And so, like a kid who had clearly been watching too much wrestling, I got him into this nasty headlock and was doing my best to give him a few punches. I was feeling pretty good about things until this giant hand grabbed me and then Josh by the neck. Mr. Fein was none too pleased by either of our actions and before you know it we were headed to Principal Angus' office. I was absolutely petrified.

Until that is, we turned the corner and I could see that the principle's office lights were off. It was a Friday and he had gone home for the weekend. This brief respite was quickly crushed when Mr. Fein said, "Alright boys, we'll come back on Monday." Needless to say those next three days were excruciating for me. I didn't know what was going to happen when I went to school on Monday. Didn't know how angry the principal would be and what kind of punishment he would dole out. I didn't know whether Mr. Fein would still be disappointed in me, a fate as bad as anything the principal could ever do to me.

I'm not sure that Josh and I ever actually talked out a game plan for that coming Monday, but I do know that it was the same one. Do nothing, absolutely nothing, which might remind Mr. Fein of what we had done. It was like Josh and I were best friends again; laughing and smiling and carrying on. We were great students that day, answering questions left and right, never speaking out of turn. And most importantly, yes most importantly, when it was lunch time and the games were pulled out to be played, Stratego must remain hidden deep in the bowels of the game cabinet. For if anything would remind Mr. Fein of how we had disappointed him, how we had fallen short, it was that game. Keep it hidden, act like nothing had ever happened, and hopefully everything would go back to the way it was, all would be forgotten, all would be right.

I think that, weirdly enough, Peter has been going through much of what I went through as a 5th grader. On the one hand he was, of course, delighted to see the risen savior. And yet, he also had to be pretty nervous after realizing that Jesus was risen from the dead because, to be honest, Peter's behavior before Jesus had died had been pretty disappointing, abysmal really. Jesus had told him that he would deny him three times and Peter steadfastly disagreed. And then, as they stood around the

charcoal campfire (one of only two times we read about a campfire in the New Testament) Peter denies that he knows Jesus not once, not twice, but three times. And so think about it, if you'd denied knowing somebody and then they were killed and then raised from the dead, you might be a bit nervous as well. My guess is that you'd do everything you could to be on your best behavior, hoping that Jesus would forget, that he wouldn't be disappointed. You certainly wouldn't do anything to remind Jesus of what you did. And fortunately, the first two times that Peter had seen Jesus he had said nothing about it and so Peter probably thought he was in the clear.

But then Peter sees Jesus and what is Jesus doing? Cooking. Over what? A charcoal fire (in other words, Peter's Stratego!). And so immediately the memory of what Peter had done floods back into his mind. Is Jesus going to bring it up? Does he remember? Is he still disappointed? And so when Jesus asks the first question, "Do you love me" Peter has to be wondering if this is why Jesus is asking the question. Then he asks it again and by the time he asks it a third time, as scholars have pointed out, there is no question this is exactly what Jesus is doing. Jesus has not forgotten.

And yet, in giving Peter this commission, it is clear that he is doing more than just telling him what to do. Jesus is also saying that he forgives him, enough so that he trusts him to now do his work for him. For rather than holding back and saying, "Remember how you failed me now you can have nothing to do with me," Jesus has revealed himself to Peter, has fed him, forgiven him and re-commissioned him. And one of the things we need to see in this is that Jesus first loved and forgave Peter and then, he has commissioned him. It is vital for you to see that before you can do anything for Christ, before you can feed his sheep, before you practice the 6 marks of a disciple, that you need to know that you are loved by and forgiven by Jesus. You obey Jesus, you follow Jesus, you care and love others, not in order to gain Jesus' love, but because you have received it. That is grace and that is easy for us, of all ages, to forget.

And secondly, and I want you inquirers especially to hear this, that Just like Peter you will make mistakes, you will fall short. But don't let that keep you from following him or taking part in what God has called you to do. God is always there loving you and eager to forgive you. It's easy for us, at all ages, to think that we aren't good enough to do something for Jesus, that we need to wait until we've got things just right before we can serve God. But Jesus says, I love you, you are forgiven, now go forward and share this love. This is the calling of this church that you are joining. And it is the calling of each of you, not when you get to high school or college or become an adult. It is your calling today.

That fight I got in when I was in the 5th grade was not the last one I got in that year. I actually got in a lot of fights in and out of school. And one of the things I realize now is that it wasn't because I'd been watching a lot of wrestling, it was really because I was struggling. You see it was my 5th grade year that my parents told me that they

were going to get a divorce and so I was battling a lot of things: anger, loneliness, confusion and anxiety. And then that next summer I moved thousands of miles away from the home I loved, the close friends I had made, and my dad, to Florida. And all of a sudden I started 6th grade in a new school with no friends and quite frankly with a feeling like my world had been turned upside down.

I say that to you all this morning because, as I told you a couple weeks ago, there are kids at your school who are going through things like a parent's divorce, that has confused them and perhaps even left them with few, if any, friends. And I want you to know, that you (as forgiven and loved children of God) have a great opportunity to show them the love of God. I know it would probably be awkward to just go up and say, "Hey, God loves you, no matter what you're going through," but you can do things like Jesus did for his disciples. If you didn't want to make a meal for them you could still perhaps ask if they want to sit down and have lunch with them. When you're at school or out of school or here at church you can look for those kids who may not have many friends or who seem to have a lot on their mind. That's the kind of thing that we Christ-followers do. Again, not in order to gain the love of Jesus or because we are perfect, but because of the fact that we have experienced the love of Jesus and so want to share that with others.

But I also want you to know that you have a big role to play, not just with kids your age, but with us adults here at ZPC as well. You see, the adults around you need you as well. They need your energy, your imagination, your optimism. And, as I said earlier, they need people like you who can remind them of the love and grace of God. And again, they need this not next year or a decade from now, but today. Which is why I'm going to ask you to help lead us in worship in the next few minutes.

What I have asked these inquirers to do is to go 2 by 2 around the sanctuary. One of them is going to hold water that symbolizes the waters of baptism. Three of these 6th graders will be baptized this morning and we are always called to remember our own baptism when someone else is getting baptized. Baptism is a sign that we are loved by God, claimed by God, forgiven by God. And so, if you'd like you can get up and go to that person and feel the water as a way of remembering. The other person will be there to simply remind you that you are loved by God and have been forgiven by God. So, I invite you, after the 6th graders have come up here and been reminded of God's love and grace and then go out into the congregation, that you go and allow them to feed your soul as you are reminded of God's love and grace.

In fact, when it comes to feeding Jesus' sheep, one of the best ways we can do this is to remind one another that we have been loved and forgiven by God. Whether we are new Christ-followers or have been following him for decades, we all need to be reminded of this. We do this through our words

But once you understand that this is how it begins, with God's love for you, then you understand more deeply how to love God