

It's All About Grace      2022  
John 21:1-6, 9-17

John 21:1-6, 9-17 (New Revised Standard Version)

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. 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. Just after daybreak, 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." 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. 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." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. When 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." A 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." He 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.

Back when my business included retail stores,  
   every spring and fall we would have a huge sales promotion,  
           with colorful banners that hung across the stores,  
           and blazing signs on huge stacks of sale merchandise,  
           creating an unmistakable atmosphere of bargains.

It was thrilling and satisfying to draw in crowds of customers.  
           The increased sales volume and store traffic  
           made for an exciting and exhausting couple of weeks.

But by the end of the promotion period,  
   I was always ready and eager for it to be over and done with,  
           so all those tacky banners and signs would come down,  
           and get back to normal and doing business as usual.

**For Peter and the disciples, it had been exciting and exhausting.**

It had been an emotional roller coaster of traumatic events.

There was the incredible triumphant entry into Jerusalem,  
   the teachings, parables and conflicts that week at the Temple,  
           and of course on Thursday in the Upper Room Supper,  
           with the foot washing and the command to love & serve.

But then there was also the arrest of Jesus that terrible night,  
when the drowsy & fearful disciples fled & abandoned him,  
and Peter's three denials, just as Jesus had foretold,  
**it had all been quite a ride.**

Then the next day, the horrible suffering and death on the cross,  
along with both the fear and the grief of that long sad weekend.

Then the shock and confusion of the empty tomb on Easter,  
and trying to make sense of the resurrection appearances.

It had been a long and difficult week, and the disciples were spent,  
and all wrung out emotionally, spiritually, and even physically,  
and wondering what to think about the resurrection?,  
and wondering what they were supposed to do now?

So then Peter announces, "I'm going fishing."  
I'm going back to normal, something where I know what to expect,  
and half a dozen other disciples were ready to join with him.

And typical of John's Gospel,  
there is way more going on with more connections than the obvious.

Do you remember in Luke 5 when Jesus first called Simon Peter?

Peter and the others were ashore, no fish, washing out their nets.  
Pressed by the crowd, Jesus gets into Peter's boat  
and has him put out a bit so he can address the crowd.

The story continues, Luke 5:4-6, 10-11

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ...Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

In our text today, as Yogi Berra said, "It's déjà vu all over again"  
as once again Peter's crew had been out all night & caught nothing.  
vs. 4-6

Just after daybreak, 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." 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.

There are several common elements to both stories,  
a large number of fish are caught after an unproductive night,  
then Jesus directing them where to let down their nets,  
followed by unexpected and miraculous abundance.

**These passages serve as a frame around the earthly ministry of Jesus.**

The word charcoal fire is used only twice in Scripture,

and the author uses it to indicate a connection.  
The first time was the night Peter denied even knowing Jesus 3 times,  
in John 18:18,

Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing round it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

The second time as we heard earlier today, is vs. 21:9,

When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread.  
This was about Jesus restoring the disciples to ministry.

You may also recall **the Last Supper** in the Upper Room, Luke 22:19

Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Today's text, they share fellowship at **the Last Breakfast**, vs. 12-13

Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." ... Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.

Yes, John is using sacramental language to make a connection.

All of these connections are about restoration, making things right,  
so that Peter & the others are recommissioned to serve the Church,  
especially Peter who failed so miserably with 3 denials,  
and yet will be an important leader for the ministry ahead.

Listen again for the grace and restoration, vs. 15-17

When 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.**"

A 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.**"

He 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.**"

This was not a cheap grace of denying or ignoring his past failure.

Three times, when asked, Peter had denied knowing Jesus.

So three separate times Jesus asks, "do you love me?" - "yes Lord."

Three times Jesus invited Peter to re-declare his love,  
and three times, Jesus then commanded Peter,  
to serve, to tend, and to feed his flock.

**"If you do love me, then come back and use your gifts for ministry."**

Jesus wanted to restore Peter in a healthy and healing way,  
by providing some space for truth and reconciliation,  
an opportunity to release Peter from his burden of guilt.

Jesus asked, Peter do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me?  
The question was, will you let the Lord take away your shame,

and will you let that love and grace transform your life?  
**That is how God handles our failures and mistakes, our brokenness.**

If you love me, then feed and tend my people and their needs.  
You've got some important work to do. Respond to my love **with love**,  
by leading & strengthening the faith of my other disciples  
to serve with energy, intelligence, imagination & love.

The message is, things aren't going to go back to the way they were,  
but you must carry on, for now that I am returning to the Father.  
Now you must become the Church, the body of Christ,  
a growing fellowship of believers – my followers,  
**and you must carry out the mission of the Church.**

We at 1<sup>st</sup> Pres. must also hear and heed that message of hope & truth.  
Together we have endured difficult changes and losses of Covid,  
and it's already pretty clear  
that things are not going to go back to how they were...  
**... so where are we called to go from here?**

I believe the answer is where we are, the word is sanctuary,  
that's our mission, the people & place we're called to be,  
a safe place for all where God's gracious love is lived,  
because flawed people are still precious to the Lord.

God wants his love and his truth to take root,  
to transform and bring renewed hope and healing into human lives,  
for this church family to reach out and bless other people.

There is a whole world of hurt and need out there,  
and God has called each of us to make a difference,  
for us to respond by doing something that matters.

In our world there is **an urgent desperation** for love and mercy  
that is hampered and blocked by fear, by regret, shame and guilt.  
People are wounded, sharply divided, unable to get past their past,  
desperate for reason to trust, for grace, love, acceptance & love,  
**and all of that is what the Church is called & equipped to do best.**

And what an amazing, what an overwhelmingly wonderful thing  
when someone does finally grasp how much God loves them,  
and they begin to experience the authentic joy and peace  
of a growing & deepening real relationship with Jesus,  
and a sense of belonging to something greater than themselves.

In both of the two fish stories today,  
the unexpected abundance, the huge numbers & quantity of fish,  
were to call the disciples to see and perceive **a new vision**,  
**a vision of reaching out to the world in need**,  
**by reflecting the truth of God's gracious love.**

**As we come to the Lord's Table today**,  
place yourself at the scene and try to experience it with Peter,  
do you love me? then **"Feed my lambs."**

do you love me?" then "Tend my sheep."  
"Do you love me?" then "Feed my sheep."

My friends, what if God is speaking, and we aren't listening?  
What if Jesus is calling, and we aren't responding?  
What if the Spirit is leading, and we aren't following?