

Third Sunday of Easter  
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St. Thomas Episcopal Church

1 May 2022

Readings: Acts 9:1-20; Psalm 30; Revelation 5:11-14; John 21:1-19

Our reading from Acts and our reading from John each present us with a moment of revelation of who Jesus is, followed by a call to discipleship and a clear statement regarding the cost of being a follower of Jesus.

First there was Peter's experience with Jesus appearing to him and six other Apostles after they had fished all night without catching anything. The Sea of Tiberias is simply a Roman name given to the Sea of Galilee, which means the Apostles were in familiar surroundings that were probably comforting after all the recent confusion and fear caused by Jesus' death and resurrection. We celebrate Easter having had two thousand years to process these events, but for these men even this victory was still difficult to take in.

We won't spend time today focusing on who Peter was with, but I do want us to notice that Thomas was with him, and also his old 'pre-discipleship' fishing partners James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

Today I want us to recall that there had been another night three years before when Peter and a group of men had been out fishing all night and had caught nothing. The following morning, Luke recalled Jesus standing beside Lake Gennesaret, yet another name for the Sea of Galilee, and then Jesus got into Simon Peter's boat to teach from it because the crowd was pressing in on him (Luke 5).

Simon was not yet called Peter at that time. Jesus told Simon to "put out into deep water for a catch," and Simon had answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." (Luke 5:4b-5). It was Jesus who had renamed Simon, telling him, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas (which is translated Peter)" (John 1:42).

Since that day Jesus had turned so many people's worlds upside down, including his. Peter had known joy and hope he would have never imagined possible before meeting Jesus, but there were also incredible challenges and difficulties. Peter had left everything to follow Jesus. Matthew and Luke both recalled Peter at one point saying to Jesus, "Look, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?" (Matthew 19:27, Luke 18:28).

On this day Peter was standing in a boat on the familiar waters of a lake he no doubt loved and drew comfort from. Even though they hadn't caught any fish, just being with these men he was so close to and shared so much history with must have relieved at least a little of the inner turmoil he still felt over his betrayal of Jesus and the emotional exhaustion from all that had happened.

Over these three years Jesus had calmed a storm that was so bad Peter and the others had thought they were about to die. Jesus had walked on these waters and when Peter had stepped out of the boat and lost his faith, Jesus had saved him from sinking beneath its waves.

Now Jesus was standing on the shore and calling out to them using a greeting that had connotations of affection and familiarity in the original Greek. This time Jesus did not speak a command, but rather gave a suggestion. And he did not come out to the boat to approach them, but instead waited for them to come to him.

Peter was the first one out of the boat when they realized it was Jesus. There are so many details given to us in these few verses that we could spend a great deal of time on, but for today we'll move on to considering the conversation that happened between Jesus and Simon Peter following the meal they shared.

Verse 15 tells us after the meal "Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?'" Scripture doesn't elaborate on Jesus' meaning when he said 'these,' and as you can well imagine there are many varying interpretations. The one I found most relevant was one relating to Peter's claim that he would die for Jesus; that here Jesus was asking if Peter truly loved him more than the other disciples with them that morning.

Regardless of our guesses at Jesus' meaning, we can notice with surety that Jesus didn't call him Peter, or even Simon Peter in this moment. Jesus addressed Peter the way he addressed him the first time he met him, as "Simon son of John."

Peter had returned to his fishing boat and to all that was familiar to him before he met Jesus, before he had spent three years discovering that following Jesus would require no less than him setting aside his identity. Being 'Peter' meant dying to the self that was 'Simon son of John.'

Simon son of John could spend his days on a fishing boat and probably not catch the attention of any Jewish or Roman authority higher than a tax collector like Matthew. Peter would have the attention of those in the highest Jewish and Roman offices of authority focused on him, and not in a good way.

Three times Jesus called Peter by his earlier name as he asked him, "Do you love me?" Three times Jesus made clear that this call to love involved a call on Peter's life; a call to responsibility and accountability that would require no less than 'Simon son of John' being fully transformed into Peter.

Peter might have been remembering the day he answered Jesus' question about who people were saying he was, because Jesus had then said to them all, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it" (Luke 9:20-24). This was Peter's true 'come to Jesus' moment. There was still confusion about a lot of things, but there

was no longer any confusion, or illusion, for Peter regarding the cost of discipleship.

Though we won't discuss Paul's experience on the road to Damascus today, I do want us to notice Acts 9:15-16, when Jesus told Ananias, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."

We look at Peter and Paul, and their journeys, and we are amazed by their witness and testimony and all they accomplished for God's glory in their lives, and then we think to ourselves...what does this have to do with me? My life is trips to church and Walmart and Piggly Wiggly and playing bridge and maybe chasing down grandchildren. What does Peter saying, 'Lord, you know that I love you' have to do with these things on a daily basis?

I am here to tell you it has everything to do with it. Peter and Paul preserved the gospel of Jesus at great cost, so that we might have these words as a lamp to our feet. And every day of our lives God gives us opportunities to share His love and light and grace, and sometimes even a word or two about His laws and commandments. Even if we are sitting at home alone the entire day, there is not one of us who isn't able to make a phone call or write a note that includes a reference to our being a disciple of Jesus and all that that means.

This won't always be welcomed. My own children have moments when they push back at my first response always being, 'Have you prayed about it?' I get it. But like Peter and Paul, if we call ourselves disciples of Jesus we are to submit ourselves to being used as instruments of his love, and I will tell you that Jesus sees things quite differently than I do in my flesh. What I may call unlovely, Jesus calls precious to God. What I would see as a waste of time, Jesus sees as invaluable work for the kingdom of God. What I would see as injurious to me, Jesus sees as an opportunity to display God's longsuffering grace through Christ-like patience.

Anyone who follows Jesus does so at a cost. I can't see your heart to know how difficult it is for you to be with others through the love of Christ, rather than through the impatience and anxiety and irritability of this mortal flesh. Only you know how difficult that is, but I can say I know there are moments when your faith gives you the patience and gentleness God requires of you.

As is so often the case, I don't have a nice, neat conclusion to share with you this morning, mainly because when it comes to discipleship and learning what Easter means for our lives it is a continuing journey of discovery and challenge and joy. Spend some quality time with God this week quietly reflecting on this moment and season of your discipleship journey. Tell God, "I love you more than my life and myself" and ask Him what he would have you do for His glory. Amen.