

Bothered by Jesus

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The Community Church of Sebastopol
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John 21: 1-19

Welcome to the second Sunday after Easter...no lilies, no brass, no combined choirs, no Hallelujah Chorus, and no, there will be no Easter Egg hunts after church today. No, not quite the same as Easter...but then again, how can it be? We are now post-Easter – in the season of Eastertide. It is not easy to feel Easter two weeks after Easter. I think it something to do with the inevitable rhythms of human life – life moving between expansion, new adventure and excitement on one hand, and rest, contentment and reflection on the other. It is not realistic to expect high enthusiasm all the time. Every Sunday cannot be Easter Sunday. We'd all be worn out! I'd be worn out! But this leads to the question...ok, Easter has come and gone, so what do we do now?

And Simon, Peter and six other disciples have an answer- what I think is an absolutely great answer...they go fishing! What a concept. Resurrection has come and gone so let's go fishing. Of course, for them going fishing is not simply a relaxing get-away. It is what they do for a living, at least what they did before Jesus showed up and called them to follow. But now Easter is over. That interlude with Jesus was wonderful, hopeful, exciting – it was beautiful while it lasted. But now it's over and it's time to get back to work, back to the old familiar patterns, the old familiar pre-Easter world, back to the world the way it was and probably always will be. Grab the nets, get in the boat and resume the life we left three years ago. Jesus is gone but we still have to put food on the table and provide a roof over our heads. So Peter says, "I'm going fishing. Who wants to go with me?"

Who knows what they were thinking as they climbed back into those familiar boats. Was it a hundred years ago or just yesterday that he had come to them? Was it all a dream, too good to be true, when he had walked up to them and spoken to them like someone who had known them all their lives? It had been so easy to leave the fishing and follow. Maybe they should have known better. Maybe they shouldn't have staked their lives on something that could come to such a sudden end. Were they fools to give in to their wild, joyful expectations? They should have known that the long-established ways of the world would triumph in the end, even over him; that it would finally boil down to business as usual, that nothing ever really changes, nothing new under the sun. Yeah, they should have known.

So they go fishing, back to the old familiar life. But what do they discover? They hear a voice, calling out to them, they hear an invitation, and in an instant they realize they can never go back. For them, that old familiar pre-Easter world no longer exists. In fact, they discover that their risen Lord won't allow them to go back. They are going about their business, again assuming that the world is intact, just the way they left it, when much to their surprise the risen Christ intrudes and, as happened the first time, everything explodes into wonder, miracle and extravagance. They discover that Christ has formed a bond with them, a tie that binds, and it will not be broken just because Easter has come and gone. "Come," he says, "come and have breakfast." Says one colleague, "This is the first meal of their new life together – a resurrection breakfast, prepared by the only one who knows the recipe." There on the beach, night is passing and a new day is dawning, indeed a new world is taking shape. Things will never be the same again. It is life after Easter.

A couple of thoughts about this post-Easter life. First, it pains me a bit to say this, since I spend so much time and effort getting ready for Sunday, but the risen Christ might not meet you on Sunday in worship. It could just as easily be on Monday when you are at work, or doing laundry or buying groceries. Says William Willimon, "The risen Christ is free and moving. He does not intend to remain boxed in on one day of the week, for an hour in church. He does not recognize the separation we tend to make between the 'secular' and the 'religious.' He intrudes, comes to you where you are, speaks to you and reveals himself to you. So pay attention when you are sitting at your desk or sweeping the floor or reading a book. Easter means, among other things, that Jesus is loose and that he is looking for you."

Curiously, the disciples in our text are not looking for deeper meaning or for a moving spiritual experience. They are not looking for Jesus. They are looking for fish! And believe me, I know what a single-minded pursuit that can be! I think of all the preachers I

have heard over the years, often on television, who speak of us finding Jesus or giving our lives to Jesus or taking Jesus into our hearts. You have heard those sermons, those familiar phrases. This sort of talk implies that our relationship with Christ is something that we do, something that we decide. But they were not looking for Jesus; they were looking for fish! They did not find Jesus; he found them. Says one preacher, "The risen Christ is the seeking Christ. He searches, seeks, and finds those who are not wise enough to know where or even how to search for him. Which I suppose is all of us."

Or, in the words of Barbara Brown Taylor, "One moment it all looks hopeless to you and the next you see possibilities you never saw before. One moment your problems look too big to be budged and the next you discover handles on them you never knew were there before. One moment the net looks empty and the next it does not – you discover life where was there nothing but darkness and death before. 'It is the Lord!' That is what the beloved disciple said. How did he know? How do any of us know? By staying on the lookout, I suppose. By watching the shore, and the sky, and each other's faces. By listening real hard. By living in great expectation and refusing to believe that our nets will stay empty or our night will last forever. For those with ears to hear, there is a voice that can turn all our dead ends into new beginnings. 'Come,' says the voice, 'and have breakfast.'" The seeking Christ...

And when the Christ comes to us at breakfast, or on Monday, or wherever he chooses to reveal himself to us, he also comes with a call, with work for us to do in his name. "Feed my sheep," he tells them. "I want you to care for the ones for whom I care. If you love me, then feed my sheep. Keep doing what I have been doing. As the Father has sent me, so I now send you." In that moment on the beach, Easter is translated into life. The resurrection morning is made meaningful for every morning. The Risen One has work for us to do.

Thinking of the Easter stories, I find it fascinating that the women at the tomb on that first Easter morning are told that the risen Jesus has gone ahead of them into Galilee. He has gone on ahead, back into the same world that rejected, tortured and killed him, which is to say back into the world where we live. The women at the tomb discovered, as the fishing disciples discovered, that Jesus never approaches from on high, but always from in the midst...in the midst of people, in the midst of real life, in the midst of the questions real life asks. And he calls us to follow in his way: losing our lives to find them, caring for others even when they do not return the caring, opening ourselves to the beauties of the world and not being frightened by what is ugly, taking hold of today and trusting God to take hold of tomorrow.

This is how we keep the enthusiasm, exhilaration and hope of Easter.

In the words of one pastor: "Suppose you have a ten thousand dollar bill. Wow! A ten thousand dollar bill! Just look at that. But after several days of admiring it, being in awe of it, showing it to your friends, what do you do with it? You don't go for coffee and sandwich and then ask, 'Here, do you have change for a ten thousand?' That ten thousand dollar bill will have meaning only after you have changed it into a sack full of concrete acts of grace and love."

The same is true of Easter. Jesus won't let us go. He won't quit intruding, won't quit bothering us. And he clearly tells us what we need to be about after Easter... "Tend my lambs and feed my sheep." We are sent into the world to live intentionally, faithfully, courageously. In the classic words of Albert Schweitzer: "He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lake-side, he came to those who knew him not. He speaks to us the same word: 'Follow thou me!' and sets us to the tasks that He has to fulfill for our time. And to those who obey, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings that they shall pass through in his fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience who He is."