

John 21:1-17
Interlude #1
WRCoB 4.7.24

The Rev. Dr. William Willimon tells the story
About a conversation he had with someone.

I met a man who was a member of one of my early congregations. He told me that one evening, returning from a night of poker with pals, he had a stunning vision of the presence of the risen Christ. Christ appeared to him undeniably, vividly.

Yet though this event shook him and stirred him deeply, in ten years he had never told anyone about it before he told me, his pastor. I pressed him on his silence. Was he embarrassed? Was he fearful that others would mock him or fail to believe that this had happened to him?

"No," he explained, "the reason why I told no one was I was too afraid that it was true. And if it's true that Jesus was really real, that he had come personally to me, what then? I'd have to change my whole life. I'd have to become some kind of radical or something. And I love my wife and family and was scared I'd have to change, to be somebody else, and destroy my family, if the vision was real."

Willimon says: *there are all sorts of reasons for disbelieving the resurrection of the crucified Jesus, reasons that have nothing to do with our being modern, scientific, critical people.*

It was the theologian, Jurgen Moltmann, who said
That a major reason
For not believing in the resurrection

Is, that if it were true
We could not live as we previously had.

For belief in the resurrection
Requires a change in perspective
An alteration in worldview.

Truly following Jesus is not a half-baked endeavor.

You can't be a part-time follower
A Sunday morning disciple
It's all or nothing.

That's what Peter will learn today.

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In the days following Easter

The disciples were behind locked doors
Not sure what to do.

Should they stay safe inside?
Should they venture out?

They experienced a mixed bag of emotions
Both the fear of reprimand
And the wonderment of the resurrection

Finally, Peter couldn't take it anymore
"I'm going fishing!"

The others immediately jump up
"We'll go with you" . . . and off they go.

I mean, isn't it just like just like some!

When the going gets tough
The tough go fishing!

But off they go
From Jerusalem back to their home in Galilee
Where Jesus finds them out on the water.

It's early morning.

The sun is just coming up over the horizon.

The loons are calling to one another.
And a mist is rising from the water.

You can hear the waves lapping against the boat.

A perfect morning for fishing
If it weren't for the poor night fishing.

A whole night on the water
And nothing to show for it.

They see wood smoke
Curling from a fire on the shore
And they smell fish grilling

John is the first to recognizes Jesus.

Jesus asks, how's the fishing
And tells them to try the other side of the boat

Boom! They catch fish!
I mean, they really catch fish!

So much so that when John wrote his gospel
He remembered exactly how many fish they caught.

153.

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Of all the disciples, Peter was the most outspoken
Perhaps the most opinionated
And certainly, the strongest-willed disciple.

Jesus had high hopes for Peter.
But he couldn't live up to Jesus' expectations.

He was anxious to please
And well meaning in everything he said and did

But Peter still couldn't quite get onboard
To what Jesus was about.

Really no fault of his own, I mean, who really did get it?

Peter let Jesus down
And as a result, despaired over it.

Any of us would have done so.

Haven't we disappointed someone we love
And felt shame for doing so?

My guess is Peter felt almost as bad as Judas did.

But instead of committing suicide
Peter went fishing.

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This is how I see the morning progressing.

Peter, though the first to swim to shore
Still couldn't look Jesus in the eye.

While the others gathered around the warmth of the fire
Peter stood off at a distance.

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They had finished eating
When Jesus turned to Peter.

And looking Peter straight in the eye
Asked "Simon Peter, do you love me?"

Peter, not making eye contact
Looked into the fire
"Jesus, you know that I love you."

Jesus to Peter, "Feed my lambs."

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A little later, Jesus asks Peter again

"Simon, son of John, do you truly love me?"

And Peter poking the fire with a stick

"Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus "Take care of my sheep."

And a third time (remember the threes from last week)

And remember Peter's three denials

Jesus asks

"Simon, son of John, do you love me?"

At this, Peter stops messing with the fire

And looks Jesus straight in the eye and says

"Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you."

And Jesus

"Feed my sheep."

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This simple story hits at the heart of the gospel.

It is the greatest commandment put in narrative form.

Love God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind

And love your neighbor as yourself.

It is a story about how God meets us

In our greatest need

Restores us through his love

And charges us with the responsibility

To feed his sheep.

I take it to mean
 Sharing the good news of Jesus
 Through word and deed

To do to the least of these my brethren

Working in areas of justice and peace
 Healing and restoring and reconciling

Jesus charges us, guides us, empowers us
 To be kingdom builders.

Not worldly kingdoms, but the kingdom of God
 The indwelling of shalom for all people.

The gospel according to Jesus!

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Jesus knew Peter loved him.

I mean, couldn't you tell?
 He was the first off the boat onto shore.

Jesus knew Peter loved him
 But he asked him anyway.

There was a reason Jesus asked Peter
 Do you love me
 And waited for Peter's response

"I love you" are healing words.

Healing for both, the speaker and the hearer.

Every time you say them you are filled with grace.

Again, and again, Jesus asked Peter
 And again, and again Peter responded
 Until bursting with emotion

“Yes, Lord, you know everything, you know I love you”

A flood of love and grace filled Peter’s soul.

And then the now familiar, “Feed my sheep.”

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You see, the greatest expression of our love for Jesus
Is not in our confession of faith.
Although vitally important it is.

The greatest expression of our love for Jesus
Is found in feeding his sheep.

This is our highest aim in life.

This is the fulfillment of the greatest commandment.

This is the charge Jesus places on Peter.
And the charge Jesus places on all his followers.

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Easter has come and gone.

The big event.

The Easter eggs are stored away for another year
Along with the Easter rabbit costume.

People look ahead to the end of school
And the beginning of the summer season.

So, what do we do now after Easter?

Often, pastors and church leaders
Want to build on the momentum Easter creates.

Besides Christmas, Easter sees the most attendance.

We wrack our brains to come up with something
To keep them coming!

Pentecost is next, what do we do
Followed by Mother's Day, what do we do
And then Father's Day

What do we do to bring them back?

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Maybe, like the disciples, we all need a break.

One can't ride a mountain high forever.

Maybe we need a little down time too.

We all need to go fishing!

Pastors often do take some time off after Easter

Musicians and technicians and admin assistants
All need a little breather.

Maybe after Easter, we all need an interlude
A pause between spiritual highs

It is like what the disciples needed to experience
Following Jesus' resurrection
And before the gift of the Holy Spirit.

A time of rest and respite
A time of reflection and retooling
A time of revisioning.

And when we're refreshed and regenerated

We do after Easter what Jesus told Peter to do.

We feed his sheep.

And so, the challenge for us today
Is taken from our first illustration.

For the man who encountered the Risen Christ
And didn't tell anyone about it
Because he was afraid it would change him

Our question for today is
How does Easter affect you?
How does it change you?

Is there something in the story that engages you?
Something in it that captivates you
Somethings that speaks of greater Truths

Something of both the power of God
And the love of God?

If it's true that Jesus died and was raised him from the dead

If it is true his death was an act of sacrificial love

If it is true that Jesus is the door to eternity

If it is true that Jesus is really real
And meets us in our darkest moments

What then?

What do we do after our Easter experience?

We say what Pater said
"Lord, you know everything
You know I love you."

And then, we tend his lambs.

