

Recalled and Repurposed

John 21:1-19

Fourth Sunday of Easter, (May 12) 2019

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Our Gospel story this morning is another one about the Resurrected Jesus showing up. This time it is in Galilee on the shore of the Sea of Tiberius, better known as the Sea of Galilee. We never know where Jesus will show up. Which is why we train you to pay attention, listen and watch for Jesus wherever we are.

This time, he shows up as Peter and some of the other disciples are out fishing. After the Resurrection, they've gone back to fishing. They've returned to their home, and do what they know how to do, what's familiar, back to business as usual.

Which reminds me of the story of a British professor lecturing at Cambridge (or Oxford) in 1940 when a student ran in breathlessly shouting, "We're at war!" In response, students jumped up and hurried out of the room to join the armed forces. Looking at an empty room, the professor goes out the door and signs up to fight the Nazis, too. Five or six years pass, the war has ended, and the professor returns to the lecture hall, opens his lecture notes, and says, "As I was saying, before I was so rudely interrupted..."

The disciples are back to fishing before they were so rudely interrupted by Jesus' call, discipleship, the cross, and the resurrection. This is a theme we've been talking about throughout Lent and Easter – the resurrecting grace of God interrupts our lives. It is disruptive. The change brought by God does not always seem good

at first. We have to live into it. God intervenes and changes our lives and is bringing change into this world. But we have grown complacent and comfortable with the old ways. We might be slaves in Pharaoh's Egypt but it is what we know. It is what we've become addicted to. God in Christ comes bringing liberation and healing that upends our sin-sick souls and sin-sick world.

Well, the disciples are out fishing and they're not catching a thing. Verse 3 gives us the clue why. It was night. Here is one of John's favorite images going back to chapter 1: night or darkness in contrast to day or light. The disciples catch nothing because it is still night.

After daybreak, John tells us, Jesus is on the beach and calls to them to try fishing on the other side of the boat. They heed his instructions and catch so many fish they can barely haul them in. Without Jesus and in the dark, they catch nothing. Without Jesus and in the dark, they are without resources. They are empty. Burned-out. Tired. Exhausted. Empty nets and empty lives and running on empty. With Jesus in the daylight, they catch more than enough. Peter realizes, "It is the Lord!" and jumps in and swims ashore.

When they all get to shore, they find Jesus cooking on a charcoal fire. Now there are only two places in all of scripture that a charcoal fire is mentioned. Here and back in John 18:18 where Peter is warming himself by the charcoal fire in the courtyard outside the palace of the High Priest. It was at this first charcoal fire that Peter denies Jesus three times. In chapter 21 Peter comes up on Jesus and a charcoal fire on the shore. Facing another charcoal fire, the disciples are staring at their failure and their denial of Jesus.

By verse 15 things get real and personal. Jesus calls Peter by name and asks him three times if he loves him. Peter had denied Jesus three times and if he had denied Jesus 100 times, Jesus would have asked Peter a 100 times if he loved him. “Do you love me more than all of this (Jesus motions at all the stuff – the boat, the nets, the fish and all the rest)? Do you love me more than your comfort zone? More than what you know?” “I know you’re busy, busy, busy fishing, Peter. I know there is much stress at doing this work, but it is work and stress that you know and you’re comfortable with. Do you love me more than all this?” Peter answers, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus answers, “Then feed my lambs.” Two more times, Jesus asks, “Do you love me?” and two more times Peter responds “Yes, I love you.” Each time Jesus says, “Then feed my sheep” or “Tend my sheep.”

Peter and the disciples had gone back to life as usual as if nothing had ever happened, as if, they had never betrayed Jesus. Probably, after so much disruption, they need to return to normal. And maybe if they acted as if nothing ever happened they would not have to deal with it. But a deep rupture had happened between the disciples and Jesus and it won’t heal by ignoring it. Suppressing the old wounds keeps them from healing. Forgetting the past, or not knowing our past, as historians remind us, we are doomed to repeat it.

Milan Kundera’s 1979 novel, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* begins with a photograph of the balcony of a palace, where, in 1948, the Czech communist leader Gottwald stood before a massive crowd next to his comrade Clementis: “It was snowing and cold, and Gottwald was bareheaded. Bursting with solicitude, Clementis took off his fur hat and set it on Gottwald’s head.” The photograph of the two men became famous, but a few years later, the Party executed Clementis and airbrushed him out of the photo. “Ever since, Gottwald has

been alone on the balcony. Where Clementis stood, there is only the bare palace wall. Nothing remains of Clementis but the fur hat on Gottwald's head." The rest of the novel explores the motif of forgetting our history and its ramifications.

How much history have we airbrushed out of our lives? How much of the truth have we conveniently forgotten or ignored? Jesus said, "You shall know the truth and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32), which means if we refuse to face the truth we are in bondage. We are stuck in our lives and can't get out, can't grow.

This is the hard truth of any good and healthy relationships, including society, including church. Church is to be the trusting community in Christ where we can face the truth of one another and get unstuck.

Our society is changing and we hope we can grow and nurture a local community able to face reality and hear the truth. Our hope is not in returning in how it used to be or how we remember the good old days or how we wish it were. As we face the future, we are more and more going to need to rely upon one another and our community grounded and rooted in truth and reality.

Jesus confronted Peter with the truth of his sin. The good news is that Peter trusted the one speaking to him. And in so doing he discovered forgiveness and was given a new call and a new purpose. Peter heard Jesus calling him to feed and tend Jesus' sheep. Peter thought his purpose was to fish. Maybe Peter thought that the resurrected Jesus meant for him to have a loving heart, or know the truth and think about it a lot but be the "best fisherman he could be." Instead, Peter is recalled and repurposed.

John Donne reputedly said, “I thank my God for my call, my recall, and my many calls besides.” Facing the truth of who we are in the context of a trusting community, and knowing forgiveness, frees us to hear God’s many recalls.

Like Peter, it most likely will take many recalls. Peter was called by Jesus the first time as Peter was fishing and Jesus said, “Drop your nets. Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of people” (Matthew 4). He was recalled at Caesarea Philippi when he recognized Jesus as the Messiah and Jesus said, “You are Peter, the Rock, and upon you will I build my church” (Matthew 16). He was recalled when Jesus washed his feet (John 13) and recalled here, when Jesus says three times, “If you love me, feed my sheep.” In Acts, Peter was recalled when he realized that God is no respecter of persons, the Gospel is for everyone, not just the Jews, and he preached to Cornelius, a Roman Gentile (Acts 10). And he was even recalled again when the Apostle Paul called him on the carpet for not sitting at the same table with Gentiles (Galatians 2).

The living God calls us and recalls us. Gives us purpose and repurpose. What are ways God might be recalling and repurposing you? And you through this congregation? How we do church in the days to come is not going to be like how church has been done. The old models coming from post-WWII 1950’s and 60’s will not suffice in a world of climate change and refugees, gig economics, increasing technology, and social disintegration. The old model of occasionally showing up for an hour of inspiration and dropping a few dollars into the offering plate won’t be sustainable. It’s going to take a deeply rooted community of the living Christ, who tend and feed one another. --- In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One True God, Mother of us all. Amen.

