

Well, Easter has come and gone for another year; and we know for sure that the Lord is Risen! I don't know if you realize it or not, but Lent and Easter, not Advent and Christmas, are the busiest time for the church and especially the pastor; especially Holy Week, when you have a Maundy Thursday Service, Good Friday Service, and Sunrise Service and Easter Worship Services on Sunday. Now I'm not looking for sympathy, I'm just stating the facts. For the last couple of weeks, I have been thinking that if I could just get through Holy Week and Easter, then everything could go back to normal; I can relax. And then one day it hit me; God finally got through to me – what are you saying? Easter should change everything, especially you. Things should not go back to normal and you definitely can't take a break and relax; there's a lot of work to be done.

But it is a human tendency to take a breather and relax after a major event such as a wedding, the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and even Easter. In a way, the time after significant events like these is anticlimactic. This even happened following the greatest event of all time – the Resurrection. The story is recorded in the 21st Chapter of the Gospel of John, the first fourteen verses.

Read John 21:1-14

Following the Resurrection, as we discussed last Sunday, Jesus appeared numerous times to His disciples and others over a forty day period before He ascended back into heaven to sit at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. Even though Jesus had tried to prepare His disciples for the Resurrection, it still caught them by surprise. Jesus told them time and time again that the Son of Man must be handed over to the Jewish religious authorities to be crucified, buried, and rise from the grave on the third day. But they just didn't get it. Even after they had seen Jesus alive, it appears that the disciples were having a hard time grasping this concept of the Resurrection. So what did they do? They went fishing!

Now I have always found this story in the Gospel of John to be interesting. After all the events surrounding the Day of Resurrection with the surprising news of the women and the race to the tomb in the morning by Peter and John, the appearance of Jesus that evening to two people on the road to Emmaus, and the appearance of Jesus in the Upper Room even though the door was locked, look what the disciples did next. Peter says: "I'm going fishing, anyone want to come with me?" and seven of the disciples went fishing. Remember that most of these guys were fishermen before Jesus called them to follow Him. So in a sense, they returned to their old way of life as if they had been laid off from being disciples; they went back to the normal routine, the same old thing, as if nothing had happened or changed. Are we guilty of doing the same thing?

You know this time after Easter can be anticlimactic for some of us. We have gone to the Sunrise Service, sang those great old hymns “Christ, the Lord Is Risen Today” and “Up from the Grave He Arose,” put on our best Sunday clothes, listened to the long-winded preacher, hidden the Easter eggs for the kids, and had dinner with family and friends. It’s spring time and we’ve got a lot of things to do around the house, and then we need to start planning our summer vacations.

In addition, now we are able to do all those things that we couldn’t do during the pandemic with all the restrictions and lockdowns. We just don’t have time for God and church right now, after all we did go to church on Easter; there’s plenty of time for Jesus later. Our health is good and everything is going okay with the family, so we really don’t need God right now. We’ll just take a break from Him until something comes up when we need His help again. Ever felt that way or know somebody with that attitude?

A pastor in Virginia was visiting a member who rarely came to church, and invited him to the Easter service. Reluctantly, the man said: “Alright, I’ll be in church on Easter Sunday if I’m alive.” But he didn’t show up. So right after the service, the pastor took a lily from the prayer rail and went to the man’s home, and knocked on the door. When the man answered the door, the pastor held out the lily and said: “Where’s the body?” Are we a no show after Easter?

Did you notice in the text that I read that there was no discussion of the Resurrection among the disciples; they were focused on fishing. You would have thought that, having seen their Teacher and Friend rise from the dead, that they couldn’t stop talking about it. Also note that in verse 4, it states that the disciples did not initially recognize Jesus when He was only a hundred yards away on the shoreline. It was only after they started hauling in the fish that John figured out who He was. And in verse 12, it indicates that the disciples were afraid to ask Him who He was. Were they so focused on their work and fishing that they forgot about Jesus?

Are we guilty of doing the same thing? Jesus promised to be with His followers always, even to the end of time. Do we believe that? If we do, how often do we see Him? How often do we recognize that He is at work in our lives and the world around us? Most of us don’t even stop once a day and say “It’s the Lord!” Maybe once a week – here at church or during a hymn – we might become aware of the Lord’s presence. Are we so focused on the routine chores of each day and our service projects that we only think about Jesus on Sunday morning or is He a constant companion in our lives? Notice that the first disciple to recognize Jesus in this story was John, the Beloved Disciple, who had the closest relationship with Him. The lesson for us this morning is that the closer we are to Christ, the easier it is for us to see Him in the routine activities of daily life.

As you read this story do you get the feeling that the meaning of the Resurrection and what Jesus expects of them had not sunk in yet to the disciples? In these verses, it doesn't appear that the miracle of the Resurrection had changed them or had any impact upon their lives. Why? You would have thought that having seen Jesus die on the cross and then just three days later appear in the middle of the Upper Room alive would have had a definite impact on their lives. Don't you think that this experience would have changed them? It seems logical that after this that they would begin to understand all the sayings and teachings of Jesus; it would all finally start coming together. They would begin to see that all the prophecies about Jesus were being fulfilled. Wouldn't you think that after all this they would have grasped the power that was available to them?

But how can we criticize them; after all we know how the story ends, they were just living it moment by moment. Has the experience of Easter changed our lives? Has all that we studied during Lent about the price that Jesus paid on the cross sunk in to us yet? Did we learn anything? Did we grow closer to the Lord? Do we celebrate Easter every day or just once a year? If we have really been to the cross and the empty tomb; if we have really accepted Jesus into our hearts, then our lives should have been changed, and serving Jesus should now be the focus of our lives.

Of course, this fishing trip is not the end of the story. The disciples eventually do grasp what is expected of them. At the end of the Gospel of Luke after Jesus blesses them and ascends into heaven, the disciples and other followers return to Jerusalem with great joy, and are continually in the Temple praising God. Then with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, they turned the world upside down with the message of the Resurrection and Good News.

Unfortunately, like the disciples in this morning's story, we have a tendency to drift back into our comfort zone and the routines of life, and need an occasional reminder as to what God wants us to do with our lives. I think that's why Jesus suddenly appeared to the disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and cooked breakfast for them. Jesus, having lived among us, understood human nature and goes to remind the disciples what He had called them to do; what He expects of them.

In addition, as you study the gospels, you get the impression that the disciples were always one step behind Jesus; it was now time that they got in step with Him and His mission for them. As you read this morning's text, you can almost hear Jesus praying: "Please, Father, I need to be with them one more time to help them understand that they must keep going even though I am no longer with them physically. May they grasp the seriousness of their commitment this time."

Jesus came to remind the disciples that there is much work to be done, such as, spreading the Good News, teaching, feeding the hungry, caring for those who are sick and oppressed, and building God's kingdom. In Matthew Jesus said that the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. The disciples were the original workers, and we are called to be the workers today. As believers, we are called to serve God wherever we are in the workplace and in life. It's okay if we go back to work after Easter as long as long as we take Jesus with us.

The Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. is one of the most fascinating buildings in the world. Each alcove is decorated in themes such as art, music, science, philosophy, religion and history. In addition, each alcove has been given a motto to represent its theme. Before the motto for the alcove of religion was chosen, a petition was sent out among the leading clergy in the nation at that time, asking them to participate in a contest to create the best motto. The motto that won the contest comes from Micah 6:8 – "And what does the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." In other words, don't forget why we are here.

In this story, it appears that the disciples made two mistakes. First they temporarily forgot what they were called to do – to be fishers of people not fish. And secondly, they forgot where the source of their strength and power came from. Look what happened when they went out on their own fishing; even though they were experienced fishermen and knew the Sea of Galilee like the back of their hands, they didn't catch anything all night.

Now the Apostle John likes to contrast darkness and light in his gospel. In this story, the disciples go fishing at night which was the best time for fishing on the Sea of Galilee, but they caught nothing. Then at daybreak, the Light of the World came along on the shore in Jesus Christ and they caught so many fish that they were unable to haul the net in. Initially, they wasted their time. That's what happens when we fail to consult God and go off on our own. This story illustrates how useless our efforts are apart from the will of God.

A cross like the one we used for the Good Friday Service and is out in the parking lot is made up of two pieces of wood. The shorter piece represents our will, and the longer God's will. Whenever our will opposes God's will, when we do not accept Christ's way, complain at anything He sends our way, disobey Him or will not do His will, we find that we have made a cross or are crucifying Jesus again. But when you lay the two pieces side by side, lay our will along side His will, the cross is gone and we work with Jesus. When we go to work for Him and follow His lead, we receive the peace of Christ and the power of the Resurrection. Wendell Berry, in one of his poems, urges us to "Practice Resurrection." It's a strange command but a true one. The gift of the Resurrection must never be taken for granted and should always be on our mind.

My friends, Easter may be over, but God still has a lot of work for us to do here in Rio Rancho. Let's not drift back into our comfort zones and the daily routines, and take a break from serving the Lord. God is giving us many opportunities to reach out and serve this community through our service projects such as the Pantry, Feed New Mexico Kids, Community of Hope, Interfaith Bible Study, MorningStar, and St. Joseph Mission School, in addition to reaching out to our friends and neighbors who don't have a church home and have not accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

The point is – it's okay to take a break, but don't take a break from Jesus. Believe me; we need Him a whole lot more than He needs us. Let the Risen Lord be your constant companion over the coming days, weeks, and months. Let's make Easter a daily event in our lives and the Church! Amen