

Third Sunday of Easter, John 21:1-19

The risen Christ appears on the lakeshore

Promoted from Within

There are at least two ways that people react to grief or overwhelming emotions.

Some people want to be alone, to isolate themselves from the world and sit with the curtains drawn, alone or with a few close friends. They want to sit quietly, thinking and pondering, working through what happened. Life has stopped for them and they take time to adjust and process and cope with their loss.

When they go to visit someone who is bereaved, they sit quietly, maybe sharing stories, maybe praying, maybe holding a hand.

Other people have a hard time sitting still. They need to get up and do something. They get busy. Maybe they're running away from their feelings, but I think that for some of us the physical activity helps us to work through our emotions, kind of running it through our systems by the movement of our bodies.

This is why some people, when they hear that someone has passed away, go into the kitchen and start cooking meals to take to the family. Or they go out in the yard and cut flowers to bring, or they might pitch in to help set up folding chairs for guests or take care of the yardwork or even put together a picture album.

This more active type of person has to move, has to do, has to ACT!

In our reading from the Gospel according to John this morning, we heard the story of the risen Christ appearing to seven of his disciples on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, also called the Sea of Galilee. Peter, Thomas, the two sons of Zebedee, Nathanael, and two unnamed disciples have had enough of sitting around. They need to do something, to work, to move.

Or at least Peter has convinced them to come along with him and go fishing. We have seen Peter all along as a man of action, a person who always had to be DOING something!

On Easter morning, when the men didn't believe the women who told them Christ was risen, Peter was the one who ran out to the tomb to check it out for himself.

And on the mountain when Jesus was transfigured and having a conversation with Moses and Elijah, Peter reacted, not with quiet awe and reverence, but by wanting to build three shelters for the three holy men! Not content to just stand around watching, he needed something to DO!

And so in today's reading, we have Peter trying to work through his grief at losing Jesus, trying to give his life some sense of being normal, by doing something familiar and active---fishing. And six other disciples went with him, even though some of them were not fishermen by trade.

They either felt the need to get out of the house or else Peter would not take no for an answer. And then, just as at the beginning of his ministry, Christ came to them, calling to them.

“Hey, guys! You haven’t caught anything all night, have you?”

“No!” They answered. They didn’t realize who they were talking to yet.

Christ convinces them to put their nets out on the right side of the boat, and suddenly there are so many fish, right there! That the nets can hardly hold them all, and yet a part of this miracle is that the nets do not break.

It’s because it’s a miracle that John, a more quiet type of disciple than Peter, recognizes that it’s the Lord. Peter and the others just might have been too busy with all of those 153 fish to really look at him. Or else there’s something about all of this that seems very familiar to John.

John identifies the man on the shore as Christ, but Peter gets to him first! Jumping into some clothes and then jumping out of the boat-----who gets dressed to go swimming??----Peter makes a mad dash to be with Christ on the shore.

So between John and Peter we have the two attributes that are necessary for discipleship----knowledge and action. Once you know Christ, then you need to act on that knowledge, need to do something as a result.

Some of us, of course, work more quietly, behind the scenes, more prayer and contemplation and knowledge, while others of us are the (quote) action people, the visible leaders, the ones who know how to get things done.

And since Peter is the one who knows how to get things done, Christ wants to get him going in the right direction. So he asks Peter “Do you love me?” Not “will you obey me?” Not “do you understand the Law?” Not even “do you understand everything I have taught you?” or “Why didn’t you know who I am a minute ago?”

“Do you love me more than these?” It’s not clear --- these what? These boats, these fish, these other disciples? Maybe it’s, “Peter, do you love me more than you love these other guys?” or maybe it’s “Peter, do you love me more than these other guys love me?” It’s hard to know just what this means, although Peter bragged about loving Christ more than the other disciples when they were in the Upper Room, so that’s a pretty good clue!

Whatever Christ meant, Peter answers, “Yes, I love you.”

Feed my lambs.

And again---Peter, do you love me?

Yes, you know I love you!

Tend my sheep

And now it's just too much. Peter is hurt because Christ asks him a third time—Do you love me?

And so to emphasize his point as well as being honest about his hurt, Peter says, You know everything! You KNOW that I love you!!

Feed my sheep.



Because for Peter, the man of action, the love MUST be put into action, or else it's meaningless. And without the love, Peter's actions will not be headed in the right direction.

The first readers and hearers of these words learned, and we learn, that discipleship means both believing and acting on those beliefs. It means recognizing and confessing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and acting on that faith. Peter, already a man of action, is a model for us. We need to be people of action as well.

What Christ was telling Peter was that the fish had been caught, but there was more to do. When Peter got to shore, Christ was already cooking a fish over the fire. But that one fish was not enough. Peter and the other disciples needed to catch more---a LOT more!---fish! The "fishers of people" had a lot more to do! And the work was on-going.

When you catch fish, you don't have to take care of them. Everyone knows what you do with fish that you've caught, and it has nothing to do with tending them.

So Christ switched to the metaphor of sheep.

Sheep, unlike fish that have been caught, require care. You have to feed them and nurture them, bringing them in to the safety of the fold and taking them out to graze in green pastures. You keep them clean of insects and shear them. You find them when they're lost.

Feed my sheep. Tend my lambs.

Christ asked Peter, "Do you love me?"

Of course, Lord. You know I do!

Jesus Christ molded a rough, hard-working fisherman into the leader of the church in Jerusalem. There was something inside of Peter that needed to be brought out, needed to be nurtured and developed.

We all have God-given gifts and talents, given to us to glorify God, to work together to build the kingdom of God, to love and serve others.

Those gifts and talents are often hidden deep within us, never nurtured or developed, unrecognized and unused. Maybe someone has said to you at some point in your life, "I think you would be really good at---" a certain job or a particular activity. Maybe someone has said to you, "I really appreciated it when you---" did a certain thing, said a specific word of encouragement or comfort.

Maybe you have always had a secret dream or desire that you never pursued because you were too busy or thought it would be a waste of time.

Maybe your life circumstances got in the way of the education you need to go after what you have been told or what you have always dreamed about doing. Maybe you believe you're just not the type of person who can do that sort of thing. Maybe you think you're not smart enough or talented enough or something or another enough to make that dream come true.

And here's the good news---YOU don't have to be anything or do anything except open the door and let Christ call you through to the other side. And yes, I know that can be a HUGE leap! And yes, I know it's scary and difficult and everything else

But think about it! Do you think Peter thought he was a good enough leader, had enough faith, enough speaking skills, enough education, enough knowledge to lead the early church? Or do you think he grew up into that role because Christ called him to do it?

Christ saw something deep within Peter and he brought it out to be used to build the kingdom of God. He nurtured, encouraged, called Peter to be the Rock on which he would build his church.

He promoted those gifts and talents from within Peter and brought them out.

He saw that all that energy and power and enthusiasm would be what the early church needed, but he knew that it would have to be channeled and directed.

And the way to channel and direct it was to make an unmistakable point to Peter, that the reason he would tend and feed the sheep and the lambs was out of his great love for Christ himself. Not because he loved the people. Not because he wanted to be famous. Not because he craved power.

Because he loved Christ more than anything else.

And what will you do because you love Christ more than anything else? What is it that is deep inside of you that Christ is just waiting to promote, to bring out of you?

What is in your heart that you long to do? God will grant us the desires of our hearts. Scripture tells us that, and this is what it's talking about. How do you want to show your love for Christ? God has given us the desire to do something that shows our great love for our savior. What is that desire for you?

Is it to feed the hungry? Is it to teach others about God? Maybe you dream of preaching. Maybe you want to help the homeless find a home or the jobless find a job.

If you are a more quiet kind of disciple like John was, maybe your desire is to help others to see Christ in their lives through counseling or teaching or gentle guidance. Maybe you can share with a colleague or acquaintance who is having struggles the answer you have found to your own difficulties.

If you are a person of action like Peter, maybe you want to go build places for people to stay or cook so they can eat. Maybe you would find joy in driving the elderly to doctor's appointments or working in a homeless shelter. Maybe there is a volunteer opportunity for you or a job in a non-profit organization.

Let Christ help you promote that gift or talent from deep inside you. Let him nurture and grow it and bring it out so that you can use it.

Christ calls all of us to feed his sheep and tend his lambs. God's work is on-going and it needs all of us working together as the body of Christ.

Look within. Find that dream. Name what is in your heart to do because you love Christ. And then, jump out of the boat and go do it!! Amen!