

April 14, 2013

Calling – Gone Fishing

The disciples have been through a lot. Jesus had been crucified and then he had appeared to them, not just once, but twice. They have in effect experienced the heights of what one might spiritually experience. But what should they do. After all while Jesus might be appearing, he doesn't seem to stick around for very long. He gives them a mission, but there doesn't seem to be much concrete direction. So what do they do without their teacher, without the one who guides them and leads them? What does this all mean? Now what? The disciples respond by going back to what they know, they go back to their old familiar patterns. They go fishing.

This is a story that captures so well human experience. In many of our lives there may be times of sudden spiritual insight or experience. Suddenly there is a new insight, a new experience of the holy and with this a new sense of purpose in life. But then what? What does it mean what do we do? More often than not, we human usually return to our old patterns. A sudden experience that is some sort of high, as much as we may desire them, they rarely bring about the transformation of our lives or the world. In part, because it is so easy to go back to our old patterns.

So the disciples are out fishing. But they are catching nothing. They were out the whole night casting their nets, pulling them up again and again with nothing to show for it except empty nets and sore muscles.

This is the problem with going back to our old ways and patterns. They may be comfortable, they may be what we know, but there is

something in us, and often in the world around us that reminds us that this is not what our life is to be about any more. As much as we might try, things just don't seem to work out, what once filled up our time, now seems empty, barren.

Then a man appears again. "Children you have no fish have you?" Talk about rubbing salt into a wound. All night fishing and there is no fish, and here is this person who shows up and seems to almost mock them. But it is not mocking. Jesus tries gentle encouragement. Try fishing on the other side. Suddenly there are almost more fish than they can manage, 153 of them. They have experienced this abundance before. It is not just anyone on the beach it is the Lord. The abundance that they once had is back.

Now to fish all night and not catch anything, probably wasn't totally uncommon. But they had already experience something more. You see when we go back to our old ways, and we try to do the same old things without God or Jesus we may be as successful as one might expect, but that is just it. That empty and the full net catches so well bounty of life, the fullness of life that is experienced with and through Jesus, and the ultimate barrenness, or perhaps it is better to say ordinariness of life when we live life without Jesus or separate from the ways of Christ.

Jesus doesn't just bless their catch; Jesus doesn't show up simply to bless the old patterns. Once Peter figures out that it is Jesus, he doesn't even care about what is perhaps one of the most spectacular catches that Peter, this fisherman, had ever experienced. Peter, the rock, jumps into the sea. And Jesus invites them to joint them for breakfast. Jesus already has everything that is needed for the meal; still he invites them to bring some of their fish. What they then share is a meal, that I am sure reminded the

disciples of the last meal they had together with Jesus with its bread and wine; as well as the time that Jesus took a few loaves of bread and a few fishes and fed thousands. I am sure that the disciples could not have helped but experience in this meal a reminder of who Jesus is, who Jesus had called them to be, and who he had sent them out to become.

It is a meal that is also filled with images of our worship. From the invitation to gather, sharing a meal again and of course the presence of God's Word incarnate, Jesus. Or if you want to see a further connection to our worship, when you come up for communion, look at the images carved onto our chalice. Our worship is intentionally much like this breakfast we read about. We all live in a world that on the whole pulls us away from God and the ways of God. It is a world that daily wears away our remembering of who we are and what we have been called to become. It is worship that calls us back. It is worship that weekly reminds us of who we are, what we have been called to, and most importantly callus us to again encounter God's Words and God's grace. This is why we worship; this is one of the reasons why this weekly gathering of the church is so important. For it is here that we are reconnected to the heart of who we are and what we are called to become. "Come and have breakfast".

Then Jesus takes Peter aside. "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these" "Feed my lambs". Peter had denied Jesus and his discipleship three times. On the one hand this threefold questioning of Peter hurt Peter, for here he was now being confronted by Jesus for his failing. But there is also something else going on. Not only does Jesus ask Peter and Peter respond three times, but also three times in a row Jesus calls Peter to

feed and tend his sheep. With this threefold calling, Jesus is calling Peter to lead what will be the church.

There is a tendency for people of faith, when there is no one to provide leadership, no one to remind people of who they are and their calling, all of us have a tendency to return to their old ways, to in time be pulled from the abundance of faith and life lived with Christ. Since this time, before even the founding of the church, God has called people like Peter, to feed and tend God's sheep. And this is one of the great needs of our day. Our seminaries are largely empty, many of the churches current leaders are retiring, and we are all left with the question of who will lead the church? Who will gather the communities of Jesus' disciples? And it is not just about numbers or empty spots. I believe that we are in an age in which the world's deepest needs cannot be addressed unless people are transformed spiritually. After all the challenge of our age is for people to again remember what life is really about, instead of chasing trinkets, the challenge is for people to remember that life is about compassion and love and not just seeking what one can get for one's self. And there is such a great need for healing. Not just at the surface, but at the very core of people's being, at that place where we connect with the divine and where God's love makes us whole, and frees us to love and invites us into eternal life. We are in an age in need of spiritual transformation. So who will respond to Jesus' call Do you love me, feed my sheep.

This is part of the message of Easter, the resurrected Jesus appears. He appears to remind his disciples of who they are and what their calling is. He appears to prepare people and feed them for the mission they are called to. So I encourage you this day, to not only be fed by the word and meal here,

but also remember your calling and if God is calling you to be a leader of the church, someone who feeds God's sheep, perhaps today is a good day to respond to God's call, for the need for shepherds is great.