

Year C May 5, 2019  
Third Sunday of Easter  
Christ Church Mexia  
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This morning we find a small band of the disciples sitting on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias. The Sea of Tiberias is a portion of the north end of the Sea of Galilee. As followers of Jesus, they had been on this body of water many times. It is an old and familiar location for them. It is a little over a week since Jesus rose from the grave and appeared to them in that locked room that Fr. Ray told us about last week.

We see Simon Peter, Thomas the Episcopalian, Nathanael of Cana, James, John, and two other disciples in the shipyard. Peter stands up and says in essence, "I can't stand it anymore. I am going fishing. Who wants to join me?" So, they set out on a fishing expedition.

Remember, these were professional fishermen before they started following Christ. Fishing is something that they know. It is familiar and comfortable to them. But the fishing trip takes an unexpected turn.

After fishing all night, they had caught nothing. While sitting in their boat cleaning their nets of the debris that they drug in during the night and getting ready to head into shore, someone in the boat sees a man standing on the beach looking at them. He calls it to the attention of the other men in the boat. One of the other disciples tells Peter that it is the Lord on the shore. Peter realizes who he is seeing and dives overboard and starts to swim. The other disciples row the boat ashore about the same time Peter arrives. Jesus asked them what they caught, and they tell Him about catching nothing. He tells them to row back out and fish from the right side of the boat.

We read that and don't catch the significance of what Jesus had just asked them to do. Remember they are professional fishermen. We're not first-century fishermen, so we don't catch the problem here. In early fishing boats, before the invention of the rudder, the right side of the boat had a steering board that hung over the side of the vessel or came out of the back through a hole on the right side. In fact, "starboard," which we know is the right side of the boat, is a corruption of the words "steering" and "board." With the steering board on the right side, it would have been very difficult to fish on the right side. When you would get in and out of a boat or fish from a boat, you would do it from the left side because of that steering board. When you came into port, you would always come in with the left side of the boat facing the dock. The left

side was originally called the “laddebord” a Middle English word referring to the side of the ship on which cargo was loaded. It was changed to “larboard” in the 16th century. But “larboard” was too easily confused with “starboard” so in 1844 it was changed to “port” because that was the side that was always facing the port. That’s the origins of “starboard” and “port.”

When Jesus tells them to fish from the right side of the boat, he tells them to do something that goes against everything that they know. But they do it. And, they catch 153 fish by morning. They rowed back into shore, and Jesus meets them. There is a charcoal fire going, and He says, “Let’s cook breakfast.” He asked them to get some of the fish that they caught. Peter brings back some of the fish from to boat to Him, and they have breakfast with the Master.

Can you imagine how Peter must have felt when he walked onto that shore and saw Jesus standing next to a charcoal fire? The last time Peter was at a charcoal fire was back in chapter 18 when he denied knowing Christ to the police and a group of servants. Peter denied Christ three time, and now Jesus is going to give Peter a chance to redeem himself and show him the responsibilities and obligations of loving Jesus.

The three questions and the answers that are about to be asked and answered demonstrate another characteristic of God and His dealings with His people. God is a very logical, methodical master. When you see a list or series of something that God says to do or things that He talks about, there is usually a progression built into them. You do them in a specific order so that the full results can be obtained. Break the order, and there are failures and consequences. Example → the Beatitudes. They are not just a list of niceties but a progressive understanding of how we are to act among our fellow Christians. So, there must be some lesson in the progression of the questions Jesus is about to ask.

In verse 15, Jesus asks Peter do you love me with a Godly love? Notice that Jesus called Peter by his given, family name, Simon. He is getting ready to talk to Peter intimately, friend to friend, not employer to employee. It also shows that Jesus is not holding Peter up against those three denials but is interested in Peter’s future. Peter answers that he has a comforting, brotherly love for Jesus. Peter is probably thinking of those denials and just can’t bring himself to say that he loves in a Godly way but, rather, in a more human way. Jesus accepts that and tells Peter, since you love me, “Feed my Lambs.”

The Greek word for lambs used here is *lambkins*, indicting young, defenseless lambs needing shepherding and direction. Jesus is thinking about the upcoming events and knows that His church is about to be established on the Earth. Because he claims to love Him, Jesus

commissions Peter to feed the young converts. “Feed” is the Greek word for a shepherd who first gathers food and then feeds it to his flock. Notice that order; gathers and then feeds.

God places the growth of new church members in Peter’s hands and in our hands. Our job is not to pay someone else to minister to the people God brings across our path. **We** are to gather the food, and **we** are to feed those lambs. We are to tend to the young ones from our life experiences, the food, that we ourselves have, not from someone else’s store. Notice back at breakfast, Jesus made the disciples meal out of fish that they had caught.

In verse 16, Jesus again asks Peter if he loves Him with a Godly love? Peter answers and now Jesus admonishes Peter to “tend my sheep.” Sheep here refers to young adult sheep. They are no longer innocent lambs needing protection but rather older sheep needing solid food and stronger nourishment. “Tend” is a more general term. It refers to the entire scope of a shepherd’s duties: guiding, guarding, folding, and providing pasture. We have to recognize that our duties change as our ministry changes. We can not continue to offer spiritual pabulum to people after they begin to grow spiritually. Our educational and formation programs must be progressive as were Jesus’ questions. As Paul tells us, we cannot continue to give milk to maturing Christians, and, conversely, Christians should not keep demanding milk when they should be moving on to solid foods.

Finally, in verse 17, Jesus changes the question slightly and asks Peter if he loves Him with a brotherly love? Jesus recognizes that Peter is still bothered by those denials and can’t say he has a Godly love. That will not happen until after the Holy Spirit comes in Acts 2 at Pentecost. Jesus tells Peter to “feed my sheep.” Here, Jesus uses the word for lambkins once again, but these are now older sheep. He is stressing a unique bond that has been created between the people God has put in our path and us. And Jesus uses the same word for “feed” that He used in verse 15. He is stressing again that the responsibility for the growth of our God-given charges is to teach them from what we have learned. We go out and gather the food through our prayer time, our study time and our quiet time and then pass it along to the people who need our help. In tending to those people, a special bond forms and that is what Jesus is hinting at. Do you remember a certain Sunday School teacher, or a priest or minister, or special friend who helped you in a time of Spiritual crisis? That is the special bond Jesus wants to form for us.

Finally, Jesus tells Peter, “Follow me.” Following someone in Biblical terms is a concept with more depth than we usually give it. We think of following as going along behind or next to

someone, maybe agreeing with what they are doing. Biblical following has more of an emphasis on the word as a noun, not a verb. To follow someone means to go the same way that they are going and do the same things as they do, whether they are with us or not. It means to adopt their way of thinking and their goals. It means to become a clone of them. Jesus didn't tell Peter to go blindly down the road. He told Peter to become another Christ in places that Christ could not be. That was the original meaning of the word, "Christian" → "Little Christ."

Peter gets it. Peter never uses the term "fishers of men" when he is instructing the elders of the church. In I Peter 5, he tells them to be a shepherd to their flock.

What are we to take away from the interrogation that Jesus gives Peter and the messages in those questions? God brings people into His sheepfold; our community, our church, our garden club, our classroom, wherever Christians are, and wants us to be sensitive to their spiritual journey. He asks us to be listening to the Holy Spirit for ways to help those people in their journey. We are to feed those young sheep with food that is appropriate for their age, and we are to feed them from what we know, not from what someone said. We are to grow with them. We are the shepherds. As Presiding Bishop Michael Curry said in his discussion of the "Way of Love" movement, we are to "Turn, Learn, Pray, Worship, Bless, Go, Rest."

Today, Jesus still asks us, "Do you love me? Feed my sheep."

In the name of the ONE God, Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

*Amen*