

## **Second Sunday of Easter**

April 8, 2018

Haven Lutheran Church, Hagerstown MD

Readings: Psalm 30; John 21

*Grace and peace to you from God - Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen*

“He is Risen. Alleluia! He is Risen, indeed. Alleluia!” What do you do after Easter? Most church offices are closed. Many pastors lay prostrate on sofas recovering from Holy Week services and glories of Easter worship. Some of us are resting after overindulging in whatever it was that we fasted from during Lent. After Easter, the eggs the children didn’t find keep showing up. Some churches bring in special guest preachers or musicians the Sunday after, hoping to keep church attendance a bit closer to the Easter Sunday crowd. Many of us just try to hold on to the glory of the day — the worship, music, energy and fellowship — with prayers of thanks. What do you do after Easter?

“The Scripture text for today is called an epilogue to the Gospel of John but don’t let it fool you. This portion is as much a part of the story as any of it. It captures the mood and the dilemma of the church and all the followers of Christ in the days . . . after the Resurrection.”<sup>1</sup> The tomb is empty. Jesus is risen from the dead. Alive but even more so as he appears to the disciples in rooms behind locked doors. He will soon ascend, returning to the Father. “Is that it? Just what do you do after Easter? Simon Peter said, ‘I’m going fishing.’”<sup>2</sup>

When we cannot see how to go forward, we tend to go back to what is familiar. For Simon Peter and many of the disciples, that was fishing. It hadn’t been a hobby but a vocation, a way of life. You needed to know the ways of the water, the fish and the weather. You also needed great physical strength to fish using heavy casting nets and hauling in a catch. During the night as they fished, I wonder

if they remembered Jesus coming to the seaside years ago, telling them to put aside their nets and follow him. And they had. They had seen Jesus do miraculous things – make water into wine, a blind man made to see, and crowds of hungry people fed. He had opened up Scripture to them and taught them so much — though they were not sure they had understood it all. “Now they had seen him back from the grave, the chains of death broken.”<sup>3</sup> Jesus had shown them God’s ways and how it could redeem the sin-sick world. Jesus had told them **they** were God’s way to carry on what he had started. He had told Peter he was the rock on which he would build this world-saving movement. But here they were fishing. Peter may have been thinking he was no rock — he had denied Jesus three times in Pilate’s courtyard, near a charcoal fire. The rest may have been thinking similar thoughts — what kind of disciples are we, out fishing in the sea rather than fishing for men and women like Jesus told us? What do you do after a resurrection?

In the first chapter of John it is written, “From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.” On this day, the disciples would learn again what grace upon grace means. While they had been churning in the sea and in their spirits, Jesus was about to give them “the grace of another day.”<sup>4</sup>

It was daybreak — light breaking the darkness of night. A man calls to them from the shore confirming that they have no fish. He tells them to cast their nets to the right side of the boat. Whatever made these seasoned, tired fishermen try one more time? But they did. They caught so many fish they could hardly bring in the haul. Suddenly the disciple whom Jesus loved, a.k.a. John, notices the man on the shore is Jesus. Peter is so overwhelmed — by the presence of Jesus and the miraculous catch — that he puts *on* clothes to wade to the shore. The rest struggle to drag the net full of fish. One hundred fifty-three large fish. That it is A

LOT of fish. All speculation about the significance of the number 153 aside, “[it is a] moment of abundance [that] reveals God’s love.”<sup>5</sup>

As they gather their huge catch and catch their breath, Jesus is there with a charcoal fire and breakfast. He took the bread; he took the fish and gave it to them. Jesus had given the gifts of grace and abundance to **all** of them: Peter who had denied him, Thomas who had doubted his resurrection, the rest who had scattered at his arrest. “Lack is transformed to abundance . . . despair is moved to hope . . . abandonment is replaced with the restoration of relationship.”<sup>6</sup> It is grace upon grace.

They had retreated to the safe harbor of the familiar in that fishing boat but caught nothing. “I am the vine, you are the branches.” Jesus told them, “Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.” (15:5) With a word from Jesus, 153 fish. After their night of worry, failure and doubt, Jesus appears. He feeds them with food and his presence. It is the grace of another day, another chance. Jesus not only shows his love but his confidence and assurance that they ARE up to the task of being his disciples. “Do you love me? Feed, tend my sheep. Follow me.” I’ll know you love me when it shows in how you live. With me, you can do it — just do it. Love as I love. Do as I do. Day in and day out. That is the grace of another day as a follower of Jesus: “the opportunity to put our deeds where our creeds are,”<sup>7</sup> the chance to become more of the person God created us to be.

That is what we are to do after Easter. Live in the grace of God, the love revealed in Jesus, the power granted us in the Holy Spirit. In the grace of God is an amazing place to live. Open to God's agenda. Ready to follow where God's love leads us. Empowered to become all God wants and needs us to be. "God's grace cannot be limited to the incarnation, to the crucifixion, to the tomb, to the resurrection . . ."8 The grace of God extends to each day and each of us. It reaches out when we retreat to the past, or try without success or can't figure out what's next. Easter is not over. It rises up to meet us in another day of grace. Easter is not over. Jesus is still challenging us as a church to try on the other side of the boat so we can reach people with the good news of a Risen Lord. Easter is not over because the grace of God never ends. This is "the truth of the resurrection beyond the empty tomb" that we find in this final chapter of John's gospel. "When all hope is gone, when you wonder what you are doing, when you think there is no future, when your well has dried up, when you doubt grace is true, when you question if grace is for you . . . Jesus will always show up on the shore [in some way], he will invite us to share a meal once again," he will give us the grace of another day where God will meet us. "Do you love me?" "Then do not be afraid. Follow me. We have some incredible work to do together." "Christ is Risen. Alleluia! He is Risen, indeed. Alleluia!" Now live as if it matters. Amen.

Linda M Alessandri 4/7/18

ENDNOTES

---

1. Fred B. Craddock, "What Do We Do After Easter?" The Collected Sermons of Fred B. Craddock Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011 p. 194

2. Ibid. p 194.

3. Wiley Stephens, "The Grace of Another Day" sermon preached on Day1 April 22, 2007 as posted on day1.org

4. Ibid

5. Karoline Lewis, "Resurrection is Abundance" for Sunday, April 03, 2016 as posted on workingpreacher.org

6. Ibid

7. Wiley

8. Ibid.