

The Third Sunday of Easter [C]

May 5, 2019

Haven Lutheran Church

Readings: Psalm 30; John 21: 1-19

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

Christ is risen. The disciples had seen him several times to confirm the truth of it. These disciples were actual witnesses to the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus. The Lord had gifted them with the peace, power and purpose. Go tell others about the love, forgiveness, promises of God revealed in Jesus. Go tell others about the way of life that promotes and points toward God's salvation of all creation. So what are they back doing what they did before they ever met Jesus? Is it a bit of stress-relief or the comfort of the familiar?

We can wonder why but we can also understand. It's a bit overwhelming to think about carrying on the work of Jesus. It's a lot safer to be back fishing... or to be here, in a church nave. That's "nave" from the Latin "*navis*," meaning ship — one of the early Christian symbols for the church. Let's go fishing. Let's go to church. We know how to do that. We know how to worship on Sunday. It's not that either fishing or gathering in church is bad. It's just not the full picture of our discipleship. Into our fear, denial, hesitations, excuses or hiding comes Jesus. "Children, you have no fish, have you?" "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." (John 21:5,6) "And now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish."

The night had been fishless. Was it because they were fishing when they should have been doing some other work for God's kingdom? Was it because they were trying to pretend life hadn't change since they met Jesus and now a risen Lord? For whatever the reason, the night of work had been fishless UNTIL they listened to Jesus — "Cast you nets to the right side of the boat and you will find some." When we hit walls in our faith... when

we seem stalled or absent of energy in our church ministry...It's time to look for Jesus who shows up and will tell us where to cast our nets to be more fully alive and fruitful.

There was a businessperson in Pastor William Willimon's church, a man who had spent his life in an upper level management position in a large corporation. "Without warning, things at the company changed and he was fired. The company called it "early retirement" but he called it "put out early to pasture." He became depressed, sullen. They were worried about him."

"Out of concern for him, the pastor asked him to help out a couple of mornings a week at the church clothes closet. He was reluctant at first. Maybe he thought this quite a comedown for one who had previously been in a high position of power. But he consented."

"While working there, he met a woman, a mother of three, trying to make ends meet in her little family on her meager wages as a domestic worker. She happened to tell him about her problems with the electric company. She had paid her bill late, but the company still turned off her electricity and now they wanted the unbelievably huge sum of fifty dollars to restore the power. What was she to do? She called the electric company half a dozen times, she said, but no one could help her. A rule was a rule..."

"The retired executive said he would call for her. When he inquired into her bill, he was shocked at the way he was treated. He demanded to talk to the manager, an old friend of many years. He agreed to help the woman with her problems.

This led to another person asking him to call a loan company about a problem she had with her loan. He did so and he got action.

A new area of ministry opened up for this man. In giving, he received. He learned what a gift it is to be able to talk on the phone, to cut through the red tape, to speak up. "I never knew what it was like to be unable to figure out all the levels of red tape and

organizational smoke screen,' he said. 'Having spent my life in business, I knew how to cut through the garbage, go to the top, and get these people the help they needed.'" He had become an advocate for the poor, someone to plead their case before the powerful.¹ A businessperson, forced into a premature retirement, was invited by Jesus to cast his nets to another side of his boat and found it full of fish. He found a new way to use his talents and experience. He was filled with new energy and purpose.

"A little church in Alabama had been saving for a decade at last to build its own church and to enable the congregation to move out of the rented space where it worshiped. A couple in the church had raised four foster children. One Sunday, during the prayers of intercession, the couple said that social services had asked them to take on three more children who had become homeless. They asked the church for prayers, 'to help us find a larger place to rent so we can take in these kids.'"

"With that, one of the oldest members of the congregation blurted out, 'We don't need to pray for that. Let's give them our building fund money!' There was applause. That Sunday the church gave the entire building fund to enable the family to have a larger home"² to give three more children a better chance in life.

This small congregation heard Jesus tell them to cast their nets to another side. They thought it would be pleasing to build God a new church. Instead, they heard God would find it pleasing for them to build up a family willing to give a home to three at-risk children. I think they cast their nets as they heard Jesus say, "Feed my sheep.... Tend my sheep." I don't know if they thought their nets were full of fish, but I'm sure they could hardly haul them in so full of resurrection power, hope and life.

Hear this, disciples and churches who may be feeling their age or health. Whether those first disciples decided to go fishing rather than do mission were discouraged, afraid, tired or giving up, Jesus showed up! Jesus showed up. He did not abandon them. Jesus

called them dear children. He knew about their night of failure. Without condemnation, with great love, Jesus offered them another way, another possibility, “cast your nets to the other side.” Then the Lord provided an abundance.

So I ask you. What is the other side of the boat for you? You may think you have little to offer due to your age, health, physical limitations, time restraints or “been there done that.” But I tell you, Jesus is on the shore calling to you ---- “Child, cast your nets in this other direction.”

What about Haven? Churches may think they are sinking because there are fewer numbers and less young people. But I tell you, Jesus is on the shore calling to us ---- “Children, cast your nets in this other place.”

If you have read the May newsletter, you know there are some opportunities before us. Can we feed 20-30 persons a lunch at Potomac Towers just three times this year? Thinking “Would love to but can’t get around too much?” — Cast your net to another side and plan the menu with one or two others. Will we have a mini-3 day-VBS this year? Thinking, “Hope we do but don’t want that responsibility?” ---- Cast your net to another side. Whether you ever have helped to plan or lead VBS before, help cast the nets as part of a team that could plan and divide tasks to be accomplished with the gifts of our homebound to the very active and everyone in between. Do we have a Block Party and School Supply Giveaway this August? No one says it has to be done like it has been. Cast nets to the other side — Join a group of dreamers to see what is possible and be fun, too. Wish we could reach more people? Cast your nets to another side ---- what might be done if we combined efforts for VBS or a School Supply Giveaway Party with Christ Lutheran Church?

Wherever we are — here or in the everyday----, Jesus meets us there and says, “Follow me.” Whoever we are, Jesus doesn’t look for us to be what we use to be or what

we are not. Jesus comes to us *as we are* and says, "Follow me." "Follow me," Jesus says, as he feeds us breakfast at our table like he did long ago for other disciples The Risen Lord has called this group of people together at this time and place and provided the talents and treasures needed to carry on his work. I believe that and I need you to believe that with me... so God's energy, hope and grace can flow through us into Hagerstown and beyond. Amen.

Linda M Alessandri 5/4/19

ENDNOTES

1. Story told by William Willimon in his sermon, "Our Advocate" preached on Pentecost 2000 [A Collection of Sermons of William H. Willimon](#) Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010 pp211-212

2. Will Willimon, "We've got an Advocate" (The Holy Spirit, by Will Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas, Part 3) October 22, 2015 as posted on day1.org