

Easter 3 2010

John 21:1-14 “From Fear to Faith”

The crucifixion of Jesus had to have traumatized the disciples. Their leader and friend had been brutally murdered and buried without ceremony. The disciples had scattered in fear. Their hopes shattered, they went back to what was familiar...the upper room, the fishing business. People in trauma often go back to the familiar, to work that is manageable. People in trauma retreat to familiar settings. But life wasn't the same without Jesus.

The disciples went back to fishing. But fishing wasn't the same either. They caught nothing. The post-resurrection stories are almost dream-like. The traumatized disciples, ghost-like appearances of Jesus in the upper room. The disciples went back home to Galilee, back to fishing. “**They went out, got in the boat, but caught nothing.**” Their hearts were not in it. They couldn't concentrate. Had Mary really seen angels in the empty tomb and Jesus in the garden? Had Jesus really appeared Easter night in the upper room? Why did he appear and then disappear to the disciples at Emmaus?

It is probably an understatement to say that the resurrection of Jesus stunned the disciples. What were they to make of it? And for that matter, what are we to make of it? Resurrection from the dead is more than a bit “unusual”. What do you do with a person who was dead, stone-cold, buried in a tomb, who is suddenly alive again, up walking around, talking and eating? This is beyond us...in the realm of the supernatural, the spiritual, the province of God.

You have to sympathize with the disciples who couldn't make sense of all these events. In their confusion the disciples were like a ship without a rudder. They were uncertain of what to do next.

So they went back to what they did before they met Jesus, i.e. fishing. And Jesus found them there. He found them and called them to discipleship again. “**Have you caught anything**”, he said. This is the question of the master to his disciples whom he had called to be fishers of men. “**Have you caught anything**”. He was telling them, “It is time to get on with the business of catching people with the good news of the resurrection!” And Jesus empowered them to accomplish their task. He went to them where they were, in their fears and doubts and he helped them in their everyday work. He stood on the shore and asked them, “**Have you caught anything?**”

To which they replied, “Nothing”. He commanded, “Throw your nets on the other side of the boat!” It’s like saying, “If you follow my word, my directions, you will be successful in your new calling.” That is true for us as well.

This episode by the lake was like a second conversion experience. The conversion was from fear to faith in what God had done in Jesus. This experience re-directed their lives and gave them courage to proclaim the gospel of Jesus for the rest of their lives...to be “fishers of men”. Their faith and courage turned the world upside down.

Their witness became bold and fearless to the point that they were persecuted for their witness. The early church was nearly destroyed by the persecuting zeal of one Saul of Tarsus. In our first lesson today we heard the account of Saul heading to Damascus to arrest any Jews who were following “the way” of Christianity. But then Jesus appeared to him and he was converted and changed. Saul was not a blank slate when it came to religion or to believing in God. No, Saul was already a firm believer. He was just “re-directed” by Jesus. Jesus re-directed Saul from the love of the law to the love of the gospel. It changed him so dramatically that it also changed his name from Saul to Paul. That’s what conversion is, a change, a re-direction.

The disciples were converted from fear, uncertainty and doubt to faith.. They no longer “feared the Jews”. Look at the first lesson again. Ananias was a Christian who moved from fear to faith and who was willing to take risks. God told Ananias in a vision, “Rise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for a man of Tarsus named Saul...” But Ananias said, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to the saints at Jerusalem...” God said, “Go, for he is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles...” So Ananias did what God commanded. That took great courage! Ananias was walking into the lion’s den. Why did he do it? Because he had faith! How different the church would be today if Ananias had said, “no way will I risk my life by going to that fellow!”

But let’s go back to the beach where Jesus called the disciples a second time. Jesus called from the shore “Have you caught anything?” They answered, “No”. “Then cast your nets on the right side of the boat!” John said to Peter, “It is the Lord”! Peter jumped out of the boat and waded to shore, the others

followed.” When they got there Jesus had a fire going and bread and fish cooking and he invited them to have some breakfast. The text says... “They did not DARE to ask him “Who are you?” for they KNEW it was the Lord.” What would cause this reaction? It would be caused by fear and by an uncertainty about the relationship that existed between the disciples and Jesus. The disciples had abandoned Jesus in the Garden, they had fled from the cross. They had hid in the upper room. Jesus had appeared to them twice and they still didn’t know for sure what was going on. They were afraid. But now they KNEW it was the Lord. Now it was clear that Jesus had risen from the dead.

How did Jesus handle their fears? He said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” To eat with someone has always been a mark of familiarity and friendship. Jesus re-established his relationship with his disciples.

We read the accounts of the resurrection and we also wonder...could it really be true? Could it be that what the Bible teaches about Jesus is, in fact, true! If it is, then the whole world has changed and knowing Jesus is nothing less than the most important thing in your life, in fact it is the key to life...life now and life after death. He is risen! If you believe this then Easter is the most exciting time of the year and every Sunday is an opportunity to hear again the glad good news that death is not the end of a life full of work, struggle, trouble and disappointment. Jesus has conquered death. He is risen! It is the preachers privilege and joy to proclaim this good news each week and it is your opportunity to hear the good news that in Jesus your sins are forgiven! And from this place Jesus will go before you out into the world you face. He will meet you this week, in your work, in school, at home, in your everyday life. He will meet you like he met his disciples at the lake. He will meet you there to ENCOURAGE you and give you HOPE. He will meet you there to give you JOY in the simple wonder of being alive and knowing that you are part of the greatest movement the world has ever known. He will meet you and he will CALL you to renewed faith and discipleship.

It is nothing less than the call to life lived now, in the wonder of God's love and eternal life in the world to come. Thanks be to God. AMEN