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John 21:1-14
Third Sunday of Easter
May 5, 2019

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text, He said to them, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some [fish].”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The glorious Easter festival comes... Christ rises from the dead... all of reality is turned on its head as life conquers death... Jesus reveals himself to the women, then to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, then to the eleven, then again to the eleven and Thomas... and then what?

“I’m going fishing,” Peter says.

That’s sort of how we respond, too, isn’t it? The great proclamation of “life and death hav[ing] contended in the combat stupendous and the Prince of Life reign[ing] immortal” has tolled and pealed into all the corners of the earth like a myriad of thundering carillons... and, eventually, the sound fades and we go back to ‘normal life.’

That’s sort of the default response every year, isn’t it? We don’t *see* the resurrection impacting daily life, so we start to wonder whether it really *does*. And, if the resurrection isn’t going to have an immediate impact, why not just go about daily life as we’ve always known it?

Actually, with a subtle but significant caveat, there's some sense in that. On the one hand, how sinful and filled with unbelief and impenitence is the one who thinks the news of the resurrection rings hollow and is useless! How doomed is the one who thinks Christ's mission is either futile, fictitious, or faulty! How lost and wayward is the one who thinks the news of the crucified Christ's resurrection has no impact on this fallen world so that that disinterested one yawns at the proclamation and goes on as if nothing has changed and he is either still in his sins or certain of his self-righteousness and without need of Christ.

On the other hand, the one who in faith rejoices at the news of Christ's victory, the one who confesses that all that Christ has achieved, secured, and overcome, He did so for 'me' (that one says) and for His Church and for our salvation and resurrection and eternal life... that one in faith still nevertheless realizes the 'now, not yet' reality of life in this fallen world and senses that – though everything is different in and for eternity, that doesn't mean each day of life is going to look, sound, or feel that different than life before Christ's death and resurrection. The faithful recall St. Paul's words that Christ and His Church will share in the resurrection, *but* "each in his own order...Christ, the firstfruits, then – at his second coming – all who believe in (and even die in) Christ."

And, if the event that changes everything forever doesn't visibly change the details of everyday, then, sure, "I'm going fishing,"

Peter can say without sin. And, “I’m going to work or school”, you can say without sin. But, not just without sin, but without uncertainty or doubt in Christ’s promises. The resurrection has come – Christ is the firstfruits of it! – and, as certainly as we have celebrated his resurrection, our share in it *must* and *will* come, but in due time... and until then, do we not continue on in this fallen world?, bearing all of its burden, delighting in all of its God-given beauty.

Martin Luther was apparently once asked what he would do today if he knew Christ was returning in glory tomorrow. Luther answered, “I’d plant an apple tree.” In other words, I’d carry on in life because – though all of life has changed because of the work of Christ crucified and risen, daily life is still daily life – not as if apart from and independent of the Lord, but dependent upon and confident in the Lord who made heaven and earth, redeemed the world, and will sustain it until He comes again in His glory.

Now, if this was the only point of St. John’s gospel, then all we would hear is that the disciples went fishing. But, obviously, that’s not the main point. John tells us what the main point is: “Jesus revealed himself *again* to the disciples.” This would now be the third time recorded in the Gospels, and of course Jesus would appear to them again before He ascended into heaven. Why record it? What’s the point?

Is not the point that we – as we descend from the heights of Easter glory (if you will) – we tend to forget that it was no mere tale and we go back to daily life as if the news of the resurrection is just a story. But, the disciples can't be said to be making it up or deceived by their own futile hopes in daily life doldrums when they see Jesus – not once, not twice, but a third time, and a fourth time. How easy it would be to compare the disciples to fanatics who supposedly saw Bigfoot or Lochness once on a backpacking adventure, or who supposedly saw some UFO once in the night sky... except that Jesus appears to them a third time, then a fourth time... there can be no confusion or doubt of the historicity and veracity of Christ's resurrection.

But John doesn't just record *that* Jesus appears to them yet again. He also records *how* Jesus reveals himself to them... and how much comfort there is in how Jesus goes about his work, for it reminds us of 'business as usual' (back to normal) in his early work on his way to the cross. Jesus doesn't dazzle them with something new – as if they must again wonder whether to believe their own eyes – rather he reveals himself to them in a way that they recognize, that they remember, that they 'understand.'

"Throw your nets on the other side of the boat." Had he not said that before, very early in his ministry, and Peter had said, "We've been toiling all night... but, at your word, I'll do so." And certainly, they might have felt a little de ja vu as they heard the voice

call from the shore and give them the very nonsensical, unprofessional fishing advice that the other side of the boat would make all the difference... and then, all of that from early in the ministry must have come rushing back into their memories as they began to pull the massive load of fish into the boat on this post-resurrection morning.

The Lord works the same way with us, reveals himself in 'standard' ways to us... partly because he knows that we in our weakness need that standardization to bring to our minds all the things we have heard and received before. When we are dazzled with something new, it may excite for a moment, but we forget what was before and we quickly wonder what additional new excitement will come next and build upon and improve upon and outdo the excitement we've just experienced.

And so, the Lord reveals himself to us not in the novel and exciting, but in the common and memorable. "Do this in remembrance of me," he had said, not because he was longing not to be forgotten, but because he knew that He would send His Holy Spirit who would bring to our remembrance all the things Christ had promised so that those promises would be standards, pillars, foundations to carry us through daily life – "This is my body; this is my blood." – those pillars of the faith sustain and strengthen us in the one true faith as we continue to plod along in the rather normal, mundane course of daily life.

And yet, as we *do* plod along in the normal course of life, as we do say, “I’m going fishing” or “I’m going to work or school” or even “I’m getting older and feel my body aging and realize my earthly life has more normal days behind me than in front of me”... nevertheless, the quite common sustenance of Christ and his revelation of himself to us changes *everything*, including our outlook on this mundane daily life.

“Behold I make all things new!” Jesus promises, so that walking through the ‘same old, same old’ of daily life does have eternal hope and meaning to it.

“I forgive you your sins!” Jesus declares, so that the ‘same old, same old’ confession of our sins ends not in the despair of condemnation, but in the certain confidence of forgiveness and salvation.

The reader of John’s gospel can’t help but assume it’s not coincidental that Jesus chose this miracle of the catch of fish – not only to bring to the disciples’ remembrance the comfort of Jesus ministry with them – but also to bring to their remembrance the new definition of what it meant that these fisherman were about to be made... fishermen *of men!*

Yes, the normal and mundane is redefined with the death and resurrection of Jesus. And that truth helps us grab at and meditate upon the little details that bring to mind Christ’s gospel promises and comfort. For example, John mentions that Jesus has a

charcoal fire going – seems like such a mundane detail... but, the only other mention of charcoal in the Scriptures is when the angel touched Isaiah’s lips with a burning coal and said, “Your sins are forgiven,” and then Isaiah was called by God to go proclaim God’s Word to the nations.

Do we not recall this as Jesus brings them to the charcoal fire and – immediately after our text – forgives Peter, restores him into the apostolic office, and tells him to ‘Feed my sheep’?

Even in the mundane of daily life, as we look through the lens of Christ crucified and risen, all things point us to the promises of eternal life and resurrection. Does not the new life of the early vegetables in the garden remind us of the new life that comes from seeming eternal winter and death? Does not the spring butterfly suddenly seem to silently proclaim the resurrection? Do we not face death with a certainty that it will give way to life? Do we not face the difficulties of daily life in a broken society and fallen world with the comfort that we have a better fatherland and a citizenship not known by those whose focus is merely this side of eternity?

Even as our gospel reading speaks of ‘business as usual’ (a ‘return to normal’), our first and second readings speak of the new life of the new Covenant procured by Christ. In this new life, enemies of the gospel are divinely made its dearest children, so that a great number of Sauls who once derided, despised, and endangered the Christian

proclamation now rejoice in it and define life by it. Indeed, even as the Church continues on in the mundane as if not a whole lot has changed, we sing the hymn of victory that declares that everything has changed – (from our epistle reading), “And they sang a *new* song” (Amazing! That heaven – that place of changeless eternity – sings a *new* song with Christ’s completed victory)... and isn’t that new song the same that we sing, “Worth is Christ the Lamb who was slain, whose blood set us free to be people of God”?

Behind the veil of the ‘same old, same old’, all of eternity has changed for us. And yet, as we endure the ‘same old, same old’ of the now and not yet, Jesus reveals himself to us in common, ‘comfortable,’ reliable ways that bring to our remembrance all He has promised. “Remain in My Word,” says the one of whom the Father said, “This is My Son, listen to Him.” And again, “This is my body, this is my blood,” says the one who had said, “The bread I give for the life of the world is my flesh.” These means of grace are so common, so ‘normal’, so mundane and routine that – if we’re not careful, we think the resurrection has changed nothing (made nothing new) – and yet, as Christ reveals himself in these ways already known and cherished by us, He brings to our remembrance that the resurrection has changed everything, so that as we hear the Word of his victory, we know of our victory... as we eat his risen body and drink his risen blood, such heavenly food prepares us and helps us look forward to our own resurrection... as we celebrate Him who

lives and dies no more, we eagerly look forward to realizing that inheritance that is ours as well, that we too – in the eternal day - will know as commonplace that we live and die no more.

Thus, be at peace with the ‘return to normal,’ for – in it – we live in the *new* normal: daily life defined by and looking forward to the resurrection.

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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