

John 21.1-19
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“God’s Love, Our Response”

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A sales rep, an administration clerk, and the manager are walking to lunch when they find an antique oil lamp set out by the side of the curb. They rub the lamp jokingly and, surprise, a Genie comes out. The Genie says, “I’ll give each of you just one wish.”

“Me first!” says the administration clerk, “I want to be in the Bahamas, driving a speedboat, without a care in the world.” Puff! She’s gone.

“Me next!” says the sales rep, “I want to be in Hawai’i, relaxing on the beach with my personal masseuse and an endless supply of those drinks with the tiny umbrellas in them.” Puff! He’s gone.

“Ok, you’re up” the Genie says to the manager. The manager replies, “I want those two back in the office after lunch.” I guess some people aren’t ready for big changes in life.

As we hear our story from the Gospel of John this morning one thing stands out to me. The resurrection of Jesus seems to have had little effect on his disciples. The narrator tells us this is the third time Jesus appeared to the disciples since being raised from the dead, and they still don’t recognize him when he arrives on the beach. It seems Jesus’ closest friends and disciples simply went back to their same old jobs, and same ole lives they had before they ever met this life changing savior.

For people of faith, this is always a fear. The church throws this big party on Easter, with trumpets and fanfare, we unbury the Hallelujah, and, within hours or days we all go back to life as it was; no change, no new life, no response to God’s tremendous and generous act of love .

Today we see Jesus help the disciples with their fishing; they had fished all night and caught nothing... he tells them to move their nets to the other side and they bring in a miraculous haul of fish, and still the airhead disciples think this is just about fishing.

Peter finally realizes it is Jesus helping them and sprints ashore like Michael Phelps or Mark Spitz. Remember Peter? Peter was the disciple who seemed to be as right about Jesus as he was wrong. He once asked Jesus how many times I have to forgive. He thought 7 times forgiving a person who wronged him was too much, and Jesus replied Forgive 70 x 7 times. Another time Jesus asked his disciples, ‘who do you say I am?’ Peter replied you are the messiah, son of the living God.” Thumbs up Peter! But just moments later he messed up again. And of course it was Peter at the last supper who directly promised Jesus he would never deny his love for his savior, but hours later in the royal courtyard Peter denied Jesus three times.

When it came to following Jesus, Peter had messed up time and time again. And yet today Jesus again invites Peter to confirm his love. Do you love me? Feed my lambs! Do you love

me? Tend my sheep! Do you love me? Feed my sheep! And each time Peter replies Yes Lord, you know that I love you.”

Maybe we are more like Peter than we think. UCC Pastor and Author Tony Robinson wrote in a daily devotional earlier this week, “my experience of God is almost never that of "finding" God, no matter how anxiously I search, no matter how many books I consult. It is almost always that God finds me, surprises me in some way...”

We can find it comforting that the disciples back then were often clueless and didn't understand what it means to follow Jesus. They, like us, messed up time and time again. And God is so good as to keep coming to look for us; arriving at our doorstep, our beach front, again and again, giving us multiple chances to try again with sincere heart, to try to make sense of the life changing love which God is always pouring into our hearts.

What I like about Peter's story is we can read on and begin to see what he did as he came to understand the depths of Jesus' love for him. We can see his response to God's undying grace and forgiveness. In the book of Acts Peter becomes one of the two most prominent preachers of the resurrection. The other one is Paul. Peter's works tirelessly to spread the good news that God's salvation is offered to the whole world. How does he know this to be true? Because it happened to him. He blew it but Jesus called him back, gave him another opportunity to love and be loved.

As we grow in our understanding of God's love for us and God's salvation offered to the whole world, what we cannot forget is this relationship calls us to do justice. Jesus is calling us to serve the immediate needs in our community, but he is also calling upon us to change patterns and behaviors of society which create these needs in the first place. Doing Justice reflects the character of a God, who through Jesus repeatedly says, “The kingdom of God is like...” and then continues by telling a story which shatters our moderated understandings of fairness, integrity and equality. Romans 14:17 tells us, “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit...”

I think we often overlook the abundance reflected in this fishing story. The disciples bring in much more than they could use. They bring in an abundance which becomes a symbol of God's abundance which while that is not endless, it is enough for what everyone needs.

Peter spends much of his life after this story showing us how it is about far more than merely fish. This is another story about God's abundance. As God's people we might ask why our story seems to be shaped by scarcity? This is another story revealing God's salvation offered to all. As God's people we might ask why our story is so often shaped by fear?

Thank you Peter, Thank you God. For when we have blown it, when we have messed and assume there is no longer any space for us in your kingdom, we are offered another opportunity to love you, and to feed and tend the abundance that is yours.

Maybe after Easter this year, we won't go back to living exactly the way we did before. Maybe, Easter has renewed our relationship with God and we can find both innovative and familiar ways to live the Easter life God has given us... because WE, like Peter, have been deeply touched by the power of God's determined, everlasting love.

Amen