

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Nathaniel's sandals sink down in the wet sand as he pushes against the boat unmooring it from the shoreline. He wades out to his knees before climbing over the side and taking a seat. The nets are ready, newly mended, as the disciples row out from shore for a night of fishing. It is night on the Sea of Galilee. In rhythm they cast the nets out and then with effort drag them back aboard. The boat rocks with the waves. They strain at the oars. They drift in the strong current. They cast the nets again and again. The hours pass. Their backs ache. Empty nets again and again.

This past week has been a night at sea for many. Chaos as turbulent and unpredictable as the sea itself has sent us reeling in its waves. In Blacksburg, Virginia, the boat violently pitched on the waters. As disciples strained at their oars, students and teachers strained to hold tables against doors to keep a gunman at bay. 33 lives lost. 33 stories abruptly ended. A sea of sorrow threatens to swallow us in its depths as we think of them and also remember the anniversaries of Columbine, Oklahoma City, and Waco, Texas all falling this past week.

In the wake of these deaths, we can't even comprehend the 113 people killed in Somalia in the last 4 days or the 125 killed in Baghdad from a single explosion or the untold numbers of grandparents in Zimbabwe who have buried a daughter or a son this week due to AIDS & now must raise and console their grandchildren. We do not know these people's stories. What kind of evil swirls beneath the surface of this water? How do we stay afloat? How does the boat not overturn with the waves? How does it not fill with our tears and sink under the sheer weight of grief?

Night fades into the early morning and a stranger appears on the scene giving instructions for one more casting of the nets.

The tired, the weary, follow his leading and catch the motherload.

Empty nets are bulging, full. One hundred fifty-three large fish, more than they could haul aboard their small crafts.

The nets do not tear. It is the risen Lord.

He comes to them in the dawning of a new day
with words of guidance and breakfast of all things.

Jesus speaks to us sitting in the boat. He speaks to our emptiness.

He speaks to our exhaustion. He speaks to our despair.

Jesus comes to us walking along the shore as the one
who has conquered death. Because of him we do have hope.

No longer does the emptiness and despair have to define us.

We are forgiven and redeemed children of God.

Jesus comes to us to show us a brand new way of life.

Our purpose now is to fish for people so that everyone
can recognize Jesus as Lord, so that everyone can know
the love of Christ and the grace and forgiveness he offers to us.

That's what Jesus has called us to do. So just go and do it.

Go and share Jesus' love. You heard me.

What are you all waiting for? It can't be that hard can it?

As an answer to that, this story does not end with Jesus and his disciples just having a happy fish fry on the beach. Jesus turns to Simon Peter as he sits by the charcoal fire and asks him a few questions.

Actually, he asks him the same question three times in a row.

“Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Why would Jesus do that?

Simon knew. The last time he had been near a charcoal fire was the night of Jesus' arrest when in its light he had denied knowing Jesus three times.

Simon Peter was one of Jesus' disciples for three years.

He had been trying to follow him then, but failed at doing it.

Other voices got in the way. His own fear got the best of him.

Those other voices at times can fill our ears and keep us
from hearing our Lord. It is as if Jesus has to compete for our attention.
What are the voices that get in the way of you hearing the risen Christ
and his call in your life? What do these voices say?
Is it the voice of selfishness? Well I have to look out for myself.
If I don't, who will? Or does the voice say that you simply
don't have time for that in your life right now.
Maybe when the kids are older, when you retire,
when you don't have such a demanding job.....maybe then.

Or is it a different kind of voice; one more like a tape that gets played
over and over in your head and holds you captive with what it says.
The voice from the past that says that you were never wanted,
that you're stupid, that you'll never amount to anything.
The voice that demeans you because of your race or gender
or any other factor and shoves you into a labeled box.
These voices & the power of their words cannot be underestimated.
For some these voices have held them in bondage for years.

The good news for us is that Jesus keeps showing up.
Jesus will not leave us alone. He shows up along the shore
and allows his disciples to participate in and witness
a miraculous catch of fish so that they will believe and know
that he is Jesus. That he has conquered death and is alive.
He gives them bread and fish to eat not just because
it's a good breakfast, but to remind them of another meal
where he took bread and a couple of fish and fed
over 5000 people. Only God himself could do that.
Jesus gives them signs so that they can believe,
believe in him once again.

And the good news is that Jesus does not shut up.
He pursues Peter just like we saw him pursue Thomas last week
with Thomas' doubts. Jesus asks Peter if Peter loves him

not to give him an incredible guilt trip or rake him over the coals.
He does this so that Peter can reclaim for himself how much
he loves Jesus. Jesus' love for him is already there.
He has already forgiven Peter for denying him.
Jesus would not have pursued him, he would not have engaged
him in this conversation if he did not want to restore
relationship with Peter and draw him back.

And by Peter saying three times, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you,"
Jesus is able to paint a picture for Peter of what loving him
will truly mean. It means tending and feeding my sheep.
Peter, it means teaching others about me and pursuing them
and drawing them to God with the same patience, tenacity and love
with which I have pursued you. It will cost Peter everything,
including his life. He will die as a martyr of the faith,
crucified upside down, so that he does not die in exactly
the same way as the Lord he dearly loved.

For us, Jesus too shows up again and again
to the fisherman on the seashore, to the teacher in his classroom,
to all of us along our daily road of life. And amid whatever voices
attempt to fill our ears, Jesus will speak to you and me again & again.
He will not be silent. He refuses to shut up.
He comes to us as the risen Lord speaking words of peace
and forgiveness and hope to all of us who have been jostled
to and fro on the dark sea of life. That darkness,
that evil is very real.

We feel its pain and grieve the damage it causes.
Yet we know that evil in the end, will never win.
Jesus loves us and all creation with a love stronger
than all the hatred and cruelty that this world can muster.
Jesus forgives us and Jesus calls us to something more;
to a love of second and third chances,
to a love that swells our hearts like bulging fishing nets,

and spills out as grace and mercy to those in our lives.
He calls us to follow him and trust him with the outcome.

Tomorrow morning as you get up I challenge you to start your day
by listening for Jesus' voice. Make it a part of your regular routine.

When Jesus asks you, tell him how you love him.

Take even five minutes to read the bible or pray
or in the quiet sit in the presence of Christ.

And then listen, keep attentive throughout the day
to hear how he is calling you to follow him.

I'll be anxious to hear from you how Jesus moves in your life
and what he calls you to this next week.