



## “Saying ‘Yes’ Again”

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*John 21:1-19*

We had such a great potluck breakfast this morning where we honored and celebrated our Sunday School teachers and volunteers. I am so proud of your continued dedication and love for our kids, youth, and adults. I'm not only proud, but I'm pretty full from all the food, so we'll all try not to take a nap during the sermon, ok? I mean, when y'all are asked to bring food, y'all bring food! We had fruit and egg casseroles and bagels... and donuts! But there's one thing I'm really confused about. If we are supposed to be good disciples of Jesus then we would've followed Jesus's example and brought the best breakfast dish ever to the brunch. Fish. Did anyone bring fish? Don't be shy, raise your hand. You see, the beginning of our scripture lesson today is about a breakfast... a breakfast of fish and bread. Let's hear the full passage of John 21.

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will go with you.” They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” They answered him, “No.” He said to them, “Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So, they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off. When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, “Who are you?” because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

The Word of the Lord... Thanks be to God.

Ugh. He had such an emotional hangover! And what's the best thing to do after three years of tireless service to Jesus, the adrenaline depletion from watching a friend stalked and killed, and a long night back at work with nothing to show for his efforts? A breakfast of champions – grilled fish! Yuck. But Peter knew better than to focus on the “strangeness” of this breakfast buffet. The smell of the charcoal fire sank his heart as the repressed memories invaded his spirit recalling his

own obstinate betrayal around a different charcoal fire in the courtyard where Jesus was being tried, beaten, and convicted. Yet, the smell of breakfast on that cool, crisp morning had a different layer this time, a fragrance of fish – more like the time he witnessed Jesus miraculously turn scarcity into plenty on a hill with five thousand hungry people. Something was different about this breakfast on the beach. It smelled of change, promise, redemption... commission. Whatever Jesus wanted of Peter, as the aroma of remembering swirled in the air, Peter, this time, was ready to say ‘yes’ again.

There was an ad campaign by a major insurance company several years back that said, “Sometimes life comes at you fast.” One of the ads showed a lady, learning that she had just won the lottery, running into the back of a truck filled with dirt. Another showed a man getting in his car to start it, only to have it fall to pieces around him. And one more showed something as simple and delicate as a butterfly setting of a chain reaction of events that eventually launched a sailboat through the roof of someone’s home. It is true that even the littlest things can cause life to be more than we can handle. There are times when life comes at us so fast and we only want to slink away to the bar, the golf course, the television, the bedroom with a book, to get back to the familiar and escape life, if even for second.

This feeling of getting back to normal is what the disciples wanted. They wanted to escape life. For you see, they had indeed said ‘yes’ to Jesus’ request to follow him years before. They had become witnesses to miracles as the lame walked, the blind saw, the deaf heard, and the hungry were filled. They had the scriptures opened up to them through Jesus’ teachings. They partook in a peculiar Passover meal. They witnessed his bloody brutal beating, a massacring mob, his sham of a trial, his merciless crucifixion. They ran for their lives, they hid for their lives, they were scared for their lives. They saw a ghost, they saw death defeated, and they saw the bonds broken. They were overwhelmed and overloaded.

The disciples had been on an emotional rollercoaster because of the events of Good Friday and Easter, and I’m sure they were at the point of exhaustion when they returned to what they knew best – fishing. The Sea of Galilee represented a safe space for the disciples. It was what they knew. It was what they had done for years, what they were comfortable with, back before Jesus came and called them the first time, asking them to say ‘yes’ and follow him. After all, it was by catching fish that they had made a living. And now that their Jesus dream was dead and derailed, they returned to their safe place – their safe place on the lake.

I don’t know about you, but I tend to be like those early disciples. I also feel overwhelmed a lot. Overwhelmed by the animosity in our nation to people who are different than the majority. Overwhelmed by the vitriol displayed by our elected officials. Overwhelmed by the amount of hurt and heartache in the world that is impossible to cure. We all get overloaded with unfulfilling jobs, caring for sick and aging spouses and parents, keeping up with and corralling our kids, our own declining health, our unquenched pain, our mortgage payments, our extreme exhaustion, our short tempers and even shorter vacations. We often times need a break, a safe place, a familiar place of peace, quiet, and normalcy. When the world spins out of control for us, as it did for the disciples and for Peter, the easiest thing to say is “I’m going fishing.”

You see, the fisherman Peter was one of the first disciples and was, by all accounts, their leader. He had been called “the rock” because of his keen insight into who Jesus was when he proclaimed, “You are the Christ, Son of the Living God!” Yet, Peter’s title of “the rock” came to hold a different meaning as his hard headedness wouldn’t let him see beyond his overwhelmed nature in order to glimpse the commission of Jesus. His hard heart and hard head pounded his denials three times into his soul. And as an overwhelmed disciple, Peter essentially gave up. For there he was, after witnessing the missing body of Jesus and talking to the angel messengers, there he was returning to what had been familiar, routine, and mundane, rather than living the powerful reign of God in the world as Christ commanded.

Maybe, today, we can learn from Peter. Maybe we have covered up the spiritual signposts and benchmarks in our lives with the shroud of apathy because following Jesus has been much more difficult than we imagined. Maybe we have drained the water from our baptism story, that time when we first said ‘yes,’ because our hair is now dry and the words of “you are baptized my sister in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” is distant in our ears. Maybe we have blindfolded our eyes to the poverty, torture, abuse, and shame in our world. Maybe we have handcuffed our ability to tell our friends about Jesus and about this church that seeks to follow Christ closely. We ignore the presence of Jesus in our lives and have found comfort in life as usual. We, like Peter, have gone fishing.

But, you know what Jesus tends to do in moments like this. Jesus likes to break into our lives, welcome us to a nourishing feast, and send us out with full stomachs and full spirits to tread the precarious path of servanthood and love. Jesus broke the bonds of guilt and doubt; Jesus broke through the easy escape; Jesus broke into the darkness of Peter’s night fishing to welcome him to breakfast and shine the light of a new day into his soul, to help him say ‘yes’ again to the call of ‘follow me.’

I’m reminded of the story of a wife who put a little plaque in the kitchen that said “Prayer Changes Things.” Twenty-four hours later that plaque was missing. The wife went to her husband and asked, “What’s wrong? Don’t you like prayer?” To which he replied, “Oh, I like prayer. I just don’t like change.” When we come face to face with what we are running from, when we come face to face with Jesus, it changes how we see ourselves, how we see others, and how we see the what God is doing in the world.

The grace that Jesus gives us by finding us as we hide in our safe places is that it brings with it the challenge to change. Peter could no longer comfortably ease back into fishing. Jesus reminded him that the journey was not over. He was being given the gift of another opportunity to become what Jesus had envisioned him to be. He was being beckoned by Jesus to not simply love him from his far away safe space, but to turn that love into action. “Peter, do you love me?” “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you!” “Well then, feed my sheep.” Peter’s restoration to renewed and loving relationship with Christ was also a restoration to a new kind of leadership. Fisherman no longer, he was called to be a shepherd. He was commanded to tend Christ’s flock and to feed Christ’s sheep.

However, when called into action, Jesus noted that Peter would eventually die. “Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and go wherever you wished. But

when you grow old, someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.” And then, after indicating to Peter “the kind of death by which he would glorify God,” Jesus said to him again, “How about now? Will you die to safety and security and complacency and normalcy to act in the world? Will you not just look on in love when my sheep die of neglect, hunger, hurt, and fear?” Would you, yourself, die to your old ways and say ‘yes’ if I asked you to follow me again?”

Because if we say yes, we must realize that the love we are meant to show to the world is a love that requires action. It is love as courage, love as risk, love as not wavering, regardless of what we are called to do. Christ calls Peter and us, as individuals and as a community of faith, to follow him even where we might not want to go. This isn’t the time to return to what we are used to. This is the time to call for the best love for God, friends, neighbors, and enemies that we can muster. Or, better still, these times cry out for an active kind of love meant to bring life and love and green pastures and still waters to all, every single one, of God’s children.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Jesus has always favored his sheep. He says to Peter, “I will know that you love me when you care about my sheep, my people. I will know that you are living an active kind of love when you care about that which I care about.” Jesus loved his sheep. Jesus spent most of his time with the marginalized, the poor, the oppressed, and the disadvantaged. Jesus spent most of his time with the criminals, the crooked, and the outcast. Jesus spent most of his time loving the stranger and loosening the shackles of sinners. If we care about Jesus’s sheep, we might think about those incarcerated in our money-making prisons for only minor offenses. If we care about Jesus’s sheep, we might think about the children and women being trafficked in our very city and all over the world. If we care about Jesus’s sheep, we might think about the many colors of sheep God created and that Jesus loves each and every one. If we care about Jesus’s sheep, we might think about our LGBTQ friends and how they are excluded from churches, businesses, and leadership positions. If we care about Jesus’s sheep, we might think about how loving the poor in this city is one thing, but acting to end the plague of poverty is another. If we care about Jesus’s sheep, we might think about all of the those whose needs are great, who are on the edge, who live without hope, helpless in the face of their lives coming at them fast. “If you love me, feed my sheep!”

Many days we feel like Peter and the other disciples when they retreated back to their old profession, when all they wanted to do was go fishing or fill their stomachs with satisfying foods. We, too, have retreated into the safe spaces and protected places of our own lives. But if we want to follow Jesus and say ‘yes’ again, and truly mean it, we need to push ourselves to go on and go out. We must do more than say we will follow. We have a second chance to act in love and respond to the resurrected Christ as he calls us to feed his sheep, tend his flock, and change the world. Here’s some fish, a nice hearty breakfast! Now go and say ‘yes’ again!

Amen.