

May 1, 2022
Communion

John 21:1-19

“Finding Our Starting Place “

My ancient history professor in college was both knowledgeable and fun. On the day he returned any exam to us he always appeared in class wearing all black – the color of mourning. When he asked a question he thought we should know and we were clueless he would quote Jesus and ask, “*I have been with you this long and still you do not understand?*” And he tried hard to get us to memorize ancient Greek aphorisms so we could apply them to our lives. Before the first exam he would intone, “Remember – *‘well begun is half done.’*” And it is true – if you do badly at first you must play catch up the rest of the time. This is true whether you are talking about grades, a job, or taking care of a car. Starting out right makes a difference.

Imagine the disciples after Jesus’ crucifixion – totally lost. Then Jesus appears to them but disappears – so now they are confused. How does one process something outside of normal daily life? How do we find the place of belonging for resurrection when it shows up?

I suspect there are times we miss the opportunity to experience resurrection in just this way. We don’t see the grace on the doorstep because we aren’t looking for it or it is unusual. Which is too bad - because we are celebrating the power unleashed in the world at Easter in these days. But like the disciples – we struggle to know how to get on board with what God is doing.

Into this void comes the voice – not of carefully thought-out reason – but of Peter. Disorientation is the order of the day and not able to stand it any more Peter says, “*I am going fishing!*” We should not confuse Peter with a fly fisherman on a trout stream. Fishing in the boat he was going out in took more than one person to manage it. So, while he makes a declarative statement, it is also an invitation to those who are with him to come as well.

What do we do when the world has been turned upside down and we feel unsure and disoriented? Peter did what he knew...*and we can too*. If this is somehow a failure on his part – if he is somehow trying to turn the clock back on his life – it turns out that just as in his old life Jesus meets him where he is.

We can do worse than to do what we are good at. We can find a helpful trailhead to travel down the path before us paying attention to what we already know how to do. Not that such efforts are the final word – but *they get us going again*.

Peter and his friends catch no fish – something surely not normal for experienced fisherman. But when the insolent stranger tells them to throw the net on the other side of the boat – they do it. Your minds are surely flashing back to Luke 5 when Jesus calls Peter as a disciple after a night of fruitless fishing punctuated by an impossibly large catch at Jesus command. On this day that is exactly where the disciples' minds went. It was déjà vu all over again...and Peter dove into the sea to swim to see Jesus.

Step one - do what you know how to do. Step two - be on the look out for the hand of God and follow where it leads – even if we feel silly – throw the net on the other side of the boat...wherever God leads us to try things. The third step isn't so much ours as God's. *As we try, our need is supplied*. Be it fish or the charcoal fire on which to cook them – God supplies the need. It is one of the ways we are encouraged along the way.

Our call ***to integrate the reality of resurrection into our lives is a call to service***. Do you love me? Feed my lambs. Do you love me? Tend my sheep. Do you love me? Feed my sheep. Jesus isn't picking on Peter – though it can feel like that at first read. Jesus is helping Peter *face the worst day of his life* and showing him the way forward. Three denials are met with three affirmations of love. Peter faces his worst memory and fear - having denied Jesus – what if Jesus denies him? And Peter finds a call to life filled with the purposes of God.

Can we do that? Can we *face the things* we have buried down deep because they hurt so much? Can our weakness and imperfection be the place in which we *meet God who loves us* – who directs our attention to the places we thought were long gone to discover hope and resurrection?

When we do well, embodying the love of God means sharing it. We are celebrating Easter anew – in the spirit of Peter and his friends let's remember in these days, *“well begun is half done”*. Let's do what we can and discover God's grace bringing us home. We have to start somewhere.