

Third Sunday of Easter

RESURRECTION TRANSFORMATION

John 21:1-19

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Analysis by Eric W. Evers

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. 2Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. 3Simon 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. 4Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." 6He 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. 7That 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. 8But 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. 9When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. 10Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." 11So 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. 12Jesus 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. 13Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. 14This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

15When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." 16A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." 17He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. 18Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." 19(He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

DIAGNOSIS: If You've Gone Back to Fishing, You've Missed Something...

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Unchanged*

They go fishing. Really? Their Teacher and Lord is raised from the dead, the Holy Spirit has been breathed on them, they have been sent out to proclaim the forgiveness of sins (John 20:19-23), and Peter's great idea is to hop on a boat and drop a net? The disciples want to go back to life as it was, not just pre-resurrection, but pre-Jesus. Despite seeing death undone and being anointed with divine power, they settle back into life as

it always had been. I suspect we can relate. How many of our congregations came together after Easter worship and said, “OK, now let’s launch ourselves into the community to announce and embody the grace of Christ!”? The tomb is empty, but life doesn’t seem much different.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Unfilled*

But the disciples find they can’t go back. Despite their diligent labors doing what they’ve always done well, the nets come up empty. Life that diverges from the Spirit-driven mission of Jesus isn’t real life. It may be familiar and comfortable, but it is hollow and empty. It doesn’t deliver what we’re looking for. In fact, it gives nothing. We will end up hungry and unsatisfied, working hard but achieving nothing, if we try to walk away from where the resurrected Jesus calls us. Compare the reactions of Peter and the disciples to encountering the Savior with the joy-filled dancer of Psalm 30 and the “myriad of myriads” who see the Lamb in Revelation 5 (two of the appointed texts for the day). One of these is not like the others! This leads to a disturbing conclusion: while the disciples may have some cognitive hint that Jesus is not in the tomb, there is no joy, no trust, no dancing after him. In other words, there is no faith. This is why their behaviors are unchanged.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Unsaved*

Then things move from disturbing to frightening: if there is no faith, there is no salvation. If one walks away from the risen Christ and back to life as it was, such a person is not merely unchanged. They are hardened, cold. They reject the life offered to them in Jesus. There is no salvation here, only condemnation.

PROGNOSIS: Jesus Did Not Conquer Sin and Death So We Could Miss Out!

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Pursued*

However, it is precisely to these untrusting, unfaithful, unfilled, unsaved disciples that Jesus returns, again (v. 14). Jesus pursues those who walk away from him. He does not let our unbelief have the last word. He has swallowed up the sins of the world and walked out of the grave! What obstacle, then, can our hard-heartedness be to him? He comes to us, in our mundane, old way of living, not with condemnation, but with surprising abundance and blessing! The disciples may have been fishing, but it was Jesus who made the catch. Their attention, and their hearts, were hooked by his love reaching out to them.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Pressed*

They are hooked, and not “off the hook.” What does this mean? Jesus isn’t going to leave them with status quo boats and empty nets. Life as it had been is over for them, both life as fishermen, and life as deniers. “Do you love me,” he asks Peter three times. And the third time, we read that Peter is hurt. This is not Peter taking offense at Jesus’ repetition, nor is he being delicate. This is Peter experiencing the sometimes-painful process of being changed from a denying fisherman to a proclaiming missionary. Getting the unbelief out of our souls, being purged of our “life as it used to be,” is not easy. Jesus is not quizzing Peter to find out if there is some good kernel deep within him. He is pressing the disciple, and us. Jesus presents himself as the worthy object of love not to cause Peter to make a choice, but rather to move Peter’s heart. These questions create the change in Peter. They realign him, and redirect him. By drawing Peter’s love beyond denials, these questions sanctify him, creating in him the answer of “yes, Lord, I love you.” Now, he is different.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Filled and Sent*

Feed, tend, follow. All preceded by “have some breakfast.” Jesus changes Peter, and fills him up. Now he is ready to serve and go. This will be a path of suffering (vv. 18-19), but it will no

longer be an empty life. He is filled with the superabundance of Christ's grace. In that power, Peter can leave behind life as it always was. The disciples are filled up by that beachfront breakfast, but not just with food. They are filled up with new things to do, tasks put into them by Jesus, ways in which his redeeming love will express itself in and through them. Like the disciples, we too will be changed. We are enabled to serve, feed, tend, or witness, whatever tasks it might be that Jesus gives us. Jesus is going fishing for people in the world. And we heed the call to go with him. Amen!