

# Third Sunday of Easter

## TRANSLATING FAITH INTO LOVE

John 21:1-19

Third Sunday of Easter

Analysis by Norbert E. Kabelitz

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.

15 When 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.'

*NOTE: You will find it helpful to review Robert H. Smith's "Easter Gospels" regarding John 21, pages 171-197, seeking an answer to the "Easter absence" of Jesus for the second generation community of "the Beloved."*

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## **DIAGNOSIS: Backsliding to the Old Ways for Survival**

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – Where Is Jesus?**

The return to fishing seems to imply that the disciples were unable to sustain Easter beyond infrequent resurrection appearances. While limited previous Easter appearances created surprise and amazement, they also generated perplexity and

confusion. What does it all mean? Without a lively and ongoing connection with the Risen Lord, the community of John (and our own) are tempted to fall into backsliding, into familiar old ways out of which the disciples were originally called to a new creation. Might it be so also among us? I.e., the decline in church attendance and activity after Easter, a symptom that the problem is still with us?

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *Survival of the Fittest***

Without a certain and continuous connection with Jesus we drift back into trying to make it on our own. We will use and invent independent methods for surviving on our own (rather than the Easter connection that would lead us to the adventure of new Easter life.) The all night effort (night in John = darkness, being “in the dark,” ignorance, doubt, unbelief) suggests belief in our old ways for survival. We climb back into our old boats and throughout the night throw out our nets and catch nothing. The Christian mission of “catching people” catches nothing. Zero. Why might this be?

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *Without Jesus, Nothing!***

Jesus Himself meets them. While He addresses them as “comrades,” even “friends,” He knows they have achieved NOTHING. “You have no fish, have you?” A yes, or positive response is not anticipated. Nothing, like “they have no wine” (2:3) or like in “all night long but caught nothing” (Luke 5:5, Simon Peter). While the sound of Jesus’ speech is gentle as to “comrades,” it has in it divine judgement (see John 15:5). “Without me you can do nothing!” We are empty and without purpose. St. Paul says it more precisely: “If Christ is not Easter Newness, then our proclamation is for nothing, and your faith is for nothing!” (1 Cor. 15:13-14) We perish without Him! Pity us! (1 Cor. 15:19)

## **PROGNOSIS: Morning Has Broken! Here Comes Jesus**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *Easter Presence and Connection***

Who, what and where is our link to Life? Where else but “in Him was Life!” Early in the morning sounds like a repeat of Easter morn with Jesus’ Easter presence. That morning signaled a resurrection from the dead. Here it has the shape of a Promising direction. Right Side (not wrong or left side). Result: a great catch, inclusive, universal, all nations? All out of nothing! Jesus provides a “Eucharistic” exchange, a feeding of Himself (see John 6), an Easter breakfast, a Eucharistic sharing. “It is the Lord,” and He it is who “took and gave” (v. 13) Bread. “I am the Bread of Life.” And fish ICHTHUS, the faithful confession in acrostic (from the Greek, “Jesus Christ, God’s Son Savior)? His identity now ours? Jesus the Risen Lord is Host. He feeds. “Come let us eat for now the feast is spread.” (An early symbol for Eucharist pictures a fish and a basket of bread including a cup of wine in the basket of bread (p. 39 “Symbolism in Christian Art,” Scribners, New York, 1959)! He gives – for our nothing and replaces our nothing with His giving and our taking. Sweet Swap. The gift Jesus gives is not the medicine of immortality, but a revelation of His sharing of Himself with the Church in its task and mission, purpose. That is what makes for eternal life.

### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – *Love as Faith in Action* (vv. 15-17) See Gal. 5:6b**

Feed the flock as I have fed you. As Peter failed three times, defaulting in the faith, he is given three times to declare and redeem his denial. He is not asked to renounce his denial, but to affirm his love (whether agape or philia) which expresses itself in feeding, nurture and care of the sheep. Peter and all like him are “shriven and forgiven” and Jesus Himself as Good Shepherd, purposes the pastoral ministry of the Church, her mission (again, see Robert H. Smith).

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – Cross-Shaped Life and Mission (John 21:18-19)**

“The Gospel has insisted on the dimension of depth, spying the glory of Jesus in His lowliness, love and Cross” (Smith). The link to life and mission that seemed to be arbitrary and sporadic in Easter appearances, becomes a Cross-shaped life of purpose and ministry with arms outstretched by which God will be glorified, through the One who came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. This is “martyrdom,” according to its original meaning: witness to the newness and presence of the Risen Lord with His Church. His “purpose driven” Church, through Word and Sacrament. (Feed my sheep.)

*Note: Helpful resource: “What is a Church For? RE-PURPOSED” by Jason Byassee, Christian Century, pp. 28-32, March 9, 2004*