

## It Is the Lord

### John 21:1-19

<sup>1</sup> After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup> Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. <sup>14</sup> This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

<sup>15</sup> 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." <sup>16</sup> A 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." <sup>17</sup> He 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. <sup>18</sup> Very 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." <sup>19</sup>(He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

Our scripture opens with the disciples gathered together, maybe before nightfall, on the shore by the Sea of Tiberias. Peter says to the others, "I am going fishing," and they respond, "We will go with you." The disciples

caught nothing "all through the night." Then the writer said Jesus was on the beach "just after daybreak." Night has passed and a new day is beginning. From the beach, Jesus calls to them, but the disciples do not yet recognize him. He knows they have caught nothing, and when the disciples confirm this, he urges them to "cast the net to the right side of the boat." When the disciples' nets are unable to contain the fish because of the great weight, the Beloved Disciple is the first to recognize Jesus in the wonderful event that has just occurred: "It is the Lord!" In response to hearing those words Simon Peter "put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea."

Many ancient authorities and church fathers find in this story of the Beloved Disciple and Peter two distinct aspects of Christian faith. John Chrysostom writes in his *Homilies on the Gospel of John*: When they recognized him, the disciples Peter and John again exhibited their different temperaments. The one was fervent, the other more contemplative. The one was ready to go, the other more penetrating. John is the one who first recognized Jesus, but Peter is the first to come to him.

The Beloved Disciple is the first to understand, recognize, and hear the Lord: this is necessary for faith; but that recognition did not cause him to go into action. It is Peter who is the first to act; he gives a response of committed faith. It seems neither understanding nor action alone constitutes authentic faith, so we need to unite the best of Peter and the best of the Beloved Disciple we are to be persons of true faith.

This also means that the church needs a variety of gifts in order to respond fully to Christ. There are multiple gifts, perspectives, and theologies in both the local and the wider church that need to be honored in order for our personal—and corporate—faith to be whole. Some see Peter and the Beloved Disciple as rivals for authority in the post-resurrection community,

but this reading suggests that they—and we—need to set aside our claims of priority and work together in patience, forgiveness, and devotion to the Christ.

Did you notice what Peter does in response to the Beloved Disciple's recognition of 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." The writer of John likes to have us rewrite relationships from the Old Testament. You remember Adam's hiding from God in the garden in Genesis 3. Yes, Peter puts on his clothes—he is aware of his sin and shame. In contrast to Adam, Peter does not allow his shame to stop him from moving toward the one he loves. Peter does not hide any longer in shame but leaps toward the risen one in joyful desire.

This Sunday is part of the celebration of Easter and involves being able to remember our stories of how shame shuts us down as persons and closes us off to growth. It does not matter what we have done, we can break free of shame and guilt and come toward our loving and forgiving Savior. We can have a liberated life of grace when, in response to God's call, we have broken free from that shame to leap toward healing and wholeness.

In the latter part of the reading, Jesus addresses Peter, asking him three times, "Simon Peter, do you love me?" This portion of the story is often seen as Jesus' rehabilitation of Peter following his threefold denial or as the commissioning of Peter. The content of the question Jesus asked Peter echoes the love command of Jesus' that we love one another. In the same way that Jesus is "the good shepherd," we are to shepherd each other.

**(Joseph A. Bessler)**

Of course, we have to have eyes to see, and it is notable that only one of the disciples recognizes Jesus on the shore. All of them see the Lord, but

only one of them, the Beloved Disciple who reclined at Jesus' breast at the Last Supper, recognizes the Lord. Could it be that "reclining with Jesus," spending tender time with the Lord in prayer, resting our mind at his heart and breast...could it be that such quiet immersions of ourselves in the presence of God are the key to recognizing God in our daily lives and ordinary routines? Are we so busy that we can't recognize the presence of the Lord in our lives? (**Gary D. Jones**)

Last week I was in Indianapolis for the Administrative Committee meeting and the General Board meeting of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). One of the things we talked about was what does it mean to be in covenant. What does it mean to be brothers and sisters in Christ and continue our relationships when we don't agree? Some of us wanted to compare this to marriage, but in our society this does not work since about half of marriages end in divorce. So we decided it was more like family. Most of us don't divorce our brothers and sisters.

This led us to consideration of the reports and resolutions that will be forwarded to the general assembly. My group spend our time listening to reports from Global Missions/Division of Overseas Ministries, which partners with people in other countries and cultures to be a critical present to assist as they as us to. This means being in relationship to understand what is helpful rather than deciding what we think is best for our brothers and sisters. We also heard the report of the Pension Fund that tries to make life comfortable for the ministers and missionaries who devoted their lives to service to God and the church. The remainder of our time was spent dealing with a resolution of grace and hospitality within the church...are there certain groups of people that should be restricted in their service within the church? Our elders and others were praying with and for us. I want to

report that we had a covenant conversation – where all were heard and spoke openly. We did not all come to agreement, but I believe recognized it was the Lord's church and not our church. When we see the Lord, we don't have to have our own way. We can ask what would Jesus do. The can offer to others the grace that we have received.

Hearing that the risen Christ appears at the Sea of Tiberias and feeds the disciples fish and bread reminds us of when Jesus blessed five loaves and two fish and fed a crowd of five thousand on the shores of the same lake. If we have wrongly concluded that Christ's abundant generosity belongs to the past and not the present, the scripture gives witness that the risen Christ continues to bless and feed us.

Hearing that the disciples cast their net on the right side of the boat as the risen Christ instructs them, we remember that the disciples never catch a fish in any of the Gospels without the help of Christ. The scripture says in effect: if you are going to fulfill the mission entrusted to you (John 20:21), you will need the risen Christ guiding and feeding you.

Hearing that none of the disciples at first recognize the risen Christ when he appears on the shore and calls to them, we remember that Mary mistook him for the gardener when she first encountered him at the empty tomb. If we have concluded, "Well, that was Mary's problem—she was lost in grief," then this scripture reminds us that the failure to recognize the risen Christ continues to plague the disciples even after he has greeted them behind locked doors (20:19-23), and after he has again appeared to them in the presence of doubting Thomas (20:24-29). If we are tempted to leave John's drama thinking that we would never be so simple-minded in identifying Christ, this scriptures warns not to be so sure. There is a good chance we will be as slow to recognize his presence as the disciples in the boat.

Hearing that Jesus invites them to breakfast and feeds them bread and fish reminds us of the earlier scene of his being at table with them when he washes their feet and delivers his Farewell Discourses. This early morning meal on the shore corrects any misunderstanding that the Last Supper was the final meal Christ ate with his disciples. The risen Christ continues to share in the table fellowship of the church, continues to supply the strength and nurture we need for our lives and work.

Finally, hearing Christ ask Peter three times if Peter loves him, we recall Christ's prediction that Peter would deny him three times (13:38) and the sad scenes in which the prediction is fulfilled (18:15-17, 25-27). If we have carried away from the Gospel the idea that the final thing to remember about Peter is his unfaithfulness, this scripture reminds us that far more important than Peter's denials is the grace of Christ: the divine willingness to engage and entrust the ministry, even to someone whose life so far has been marked by impetuosity and denial.

This scripture appeals to us not to reduce Christ and the wonders of his ministry to a story in the past, not to leave the gospel in a time and place long ago and far away. The scripture returns us to the excitement that the beginning of John, to the spirit and vitality of God's word. It affirms, through its story of the risen Christ on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, where the story of Christ's earthly ministry begins: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (1:5). The risen Christ still calls, still feeds, still empowers even doubters and deniers for the ministry. (**Thomas H. Troeger**)

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