

The Third Sunday of Easter
April 10, 2016
Year C, RCL

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Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

They had arrived home yesterday. A couple of weeks ago Jesus had died. Then he appeared to them in the upper room in Jerusalem. He came a second time there so Thomas could see and believe. Then he had gone again. After hanging around in Jerusalem a while, they went home to Galilee. What else could they do? They spent the morning checking in on their old friends, catching up on the gossip—whose sister had a baby, whose father had died, who had broken his arm in a fishing accident. Now it is getting late in the day, and they have nothing to do. They find themselves down by the wharves, the seven of them that had come this far together. Peter heaves a big sigh. He looks at the hills, at the lake, at the sky. He kicks at a stone. He says, “Guess I’ll go fishing.” James and John say, “We’ll go with you.”

So they go to get their dad’s boat and go out for a night’s fishing the way they used to before He had come into their lives. They used to be pretty good at this, professionals. Not tonight. Not only had they proved themselves in the past weeks not up to staying true to Jesus through his ordeal, now they couldn’t even catch a stupid fish. As dawn was breaking, they heard a cheery voice utter the worst words possible. “Hey, boys! Catch anything?” They were so depressed they didn’t even bother to lie. “No.” they say.

“Try the other side of the boat,” says the guy on the beach. Well, there’s hardly any point to it, but why not? Suddenly the boat lurches as the lines go taut. They have a whole net full of

fish. Young John, being the intuitive that he is, says, "It's Jesus!" Peter, being Peter, jumps into the water, because he can't wait for the boat.

Jesus already has his own fish on the grill. "Here. Add your fish to mine," he says. And then he breaks the bread. He always breaks the bread.

In John's Gospel this is the last appearance of Jesus. But for us today, the meal is all there is. "Put your fish with my fish." The fish we couldn't find ourselves, those miraculous fish that we did not earn or deserve. Those fish that we so unthinkingly consider ours, put them with Jesus' fish. Then we will eat.

This is the essence of the Christian life. We lay our lives alongside Jesus' life. We walk together. We talk with each other. We work together, and we eat together. All of us together. Not just one at a time. The Bible never seems to get tired of stating this truth. God wants to be with us. The images for this are many and varied. God goes with God's people through the wilderness in a pillar of cloud by day, and pillar of fire by night. God meets with us in the Tent of Meeting. God chooses a particular place for Solomon to build the Temple so that there will be a place where we can meet God. God sends his holy spirit to us to strengthen us and guide us. Finally, God becomes a human being to be with us. Jesus says that it is God's intention that Jesus should be in us and we in Jesus. Paul says that his life is hid with Christ.

God does this even when we do not deserve his trust, or even his company. Paul had participated in the murder of Stephen and was working hard to eradicate this new cult of Jesus. Jesus called him to a ministry that marked the new church forever. Peter, big, loud Peter, who boasted that he would go with Jesus even to death, denied his association with Jesus three times during the night of the arrest. Now on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus first called him to follow, Jesus puts Peter back together again. Three times Peter denied his lord; three

times Jesus invites him to declare his love. Three time Jesus give Peter a job to do—Feed my sheep. Be a pastor.

In this congregation we have many fish. Enough to tear a net. Our talent, our brains, our energy, our traditions, our education, our fellowship. We think of all of them as ours; we forget who gave us the brains, who taught us what we know, who built the universities, the places we work, who made everything that makes all that we have possible. The universe offered these fish to us; we took them as if we were entitled. All one hundred fifty three of them. Jesus asks us to lay our fish alongside his. Then together we can eat. Together we can be made whole. Together we can find our purpose. Together our joy will be complete.

We are here for no other reason than Jesus. Jesus is among us. Jesus goes before us. Jesus empowers us. Jesus heals us. Jesus confronts us. Jesus sends us out. To the extent that Jesus is at our center as a community, to that extent we are a church. To that extent we are Christian.

That invites us to ask: Do we follow Jesus as Lord? Do we try to discern the working of Jesus' Spirit in our lives? Do we study to know Jesus better? Do we see Jesus in the most ordinary events of our lives, like cooking or doing the dishes, or doing the laundry or commuting to work? Do we look for him in the stranger, the colleague, the client, the competitor, the guy who cuts us off in traffic? Are we prepared to leave our boats and our hurts and our sorrows to follow him? Are we ready to let down our nets where we know there are no fish? Are we ready to catch whatever Jesus puts there? Are we ready to put our fish with Jesus fish?

In one sense, our entire purpose as a Christian congregation is to put our fish with Jesus' fish. We bring all of ourselves. In our public worship this part of the Liturgy is called the Offertory. It is when we put everything on the altar of sacrifice. We put our bread and wine there. We put our money there. But the offering does not end with our food and our money. They

are symbols of all of the rest. We put ourselves, our lives, our souls and bodies, on the altar as an offering. We put our fish with Jesus' fish.

We offer all of ourselves. The things we have done and left undone. The gifts and talents we have been given. The skills and knowledge we have acquired. Whatever wealth we may have accumulated. Our dreams and our failures. Hopes and our fears. Our families and our identities. Our ancestors and our children. We bring them all and lay them next to Jesus' roots and tradition, next to his knowledge and wisdom, next to his courage, compassion, suffering, power, love, and victory. And then we eat. And a funny thing happens in that table fellowship. Somehow it stops mattering whose fish this is I am eating. It becomes hard to tell whether this insight is my own or Jesus'. We find it difficult to discern where our needs and joys leave off and the call of God begins. For as we lay our lives alongside Jesus' life and our fish alongside his fish, as we share the food, we find that he dwells in us and we dwell in him. Our life is hid with Christ in God. Our actions are done in the Name of Jesus. We have been made the Body of Christ.

As members of St. Michael's, Jesus asks us, do we love him? And he tells us, "Go feed my sheep." And "Follow me." Amen.