

John 21:1-19
Sermon Title:

Third Sunday of Easter, May 5, 2019
The Rev. Dr. Betsey Crimmins

So did you hear the joke about the two cows who were talking in the field? One cow says to the other, "Have you heard about the Mad Cow disease going around?" The other cow answered, "Yeah, makes you glad you're a penguin, doesn't it?"

Seriously, the disciples had been through a lot in a very short period of time. We wouldn't blame them if they were beginning to think they were crazy. The recent events were heart breaking, mind-blowing, unbelievable. First there was the horrific death of Jesus on a cross, a horrible instrument of death. That was followed by the news of the fact that Jesus' body was missing from the tomb where it was laid. What did that mean? Did that mean that the same people who killed Jesus would be coming after them next? And then the news of the missing body was followed by the news that he in fact had been raised from the dead and had appeared to several people. Since when do dead men rise?

So what do you do when you been through the wringer like that? You do what most of us would do – you go back to something that you know well and can feel confident about – something that seems safe and comfortable, something about which you know what to expect. So what did the disciples do? They went fishing. They were fishermen, so they went back to what they knew.

Any of you who have ever been fishing know that there is a lot of preparation involved – the boats, the bait, the nets or fishing poles all have to be prepared. Today we'd bring lunch, a water bottle, and a lot of sunscreen too. And then you get to go fishing. If you are lucky, you get a bite on the line right away. As every fisherman knows, there's also a lot of waiting, and perhaps even some disappointment.

This is exactly where we enter this text – in a moment of frustration for these fishermen. They had been fishing all night to no avail. They are tired and disappointed. I can imagine that they just wanted to go home and get some rest.

When they get back to shore, a stranger was there. He told them to go back and to try fishing again, this time casting the nets on the other side of the boat. And their nets come up full.

I've often thought that casting nets on the other side boat is a powerful point for our lives because how often we take one perspective on a problem or situation .and if that perspective doesn't yield anything, we give up. We don't try another perspective. How often it seems like there is no answer to a conundrum, even though we thought we knew what to do – So we give up; we don't try something new, something that seems wild and crazy, ridiculous.

You know that I've been quite impressed by the work that Father Gregory Boyle has done among the gangs in Los Angeles. In the 30 years that he has been working among the kids caught in gangs in, his ministry, called "Home Boy Industries," he has brought life skills, faith, and a new productive life to tens of thousands of men and women. It really has saved tens of thousands of men and women. How did it all begin? He will tell you that it began fishing on the other side of the boat with a fundamental attitude change – rather than thinking that these gang members needed to be saved. He will tell you that only Jesus saves. His job instead was and is to savor these folk – to love them and feed them as Jesus' sheep just as he has told us all to do. That shift to the other side of the boat has been huge in bringing to the folk exactly what they need – he has created pathways in which many have found a way to make an honest living, a sense of belonging, a higher purpose in life, self-esteem, and faith. His ministry is based on love, "kinship," respect, and meeting the kids where they are at. "Kinship," love, respect and appreciation - don't we all need those things?

Jesus said, "Cast your nets on the other side of the boat." Imagine if the disciples had countered and said, "But Jesus, we've never done it that way before." You know what happens to churches that stay stuck in, "we've never done it that way before." In contrast, energy is restored and new life for mission and ministry comes when we dare to cast our nets on the other side of the boat. Of all the things that this story is: it is a story of restoration and new life because people were obedient to Jesus and they tried something new and different.

But let's keep going. The disciples then have breakfast with Jesus. It is a Eucharistic event in spite of the lack of wine – only bread and fish – and in spite of the fact that no Eucharistic celebration including fish had happened previously. Nevertheless, it is at this meal in which they received a re-commission to mission and ministry. This is where Jesus restores them to who they are and what they originally were called to be and do. They are challenged to get back into the boat and try again – in more ways than one.

The whole episode reminds me of the difference between monkey hold salvation and cat hold salvation. Have you ever heard of this before? "Monkey-hold" salvation or "Cat-hold" salvation is a difference in theological viewpoint based on how monkeys and cats protect their young. A mother monkey will sound the alarm when danger lurks. The baby monkeys come running to her and hold tightly to her fur as she runs to safety. A mother cat, on the other hand, picks her kittens up by the nape of the neck and carries them in her mouth out of harm's way. So, which is it? Monkey-hold salvation or Cat-hold salvation? Does God sound the alarm in Jesus leaving us to come running and hold on tightly, or does Christ take us by the nape of the neck and carry us to the throne of grace?

It seems to me that Jesus consistently is like the mother cat. Rather than waiting for people to run to him – he goes to them – think the woman at the well – he approached her. Or Zacchaeus – he approached Zacchaeus. Or the parables of the lost coin and the lost sheep – in those parables Jesus pictures God as the shepherd who seeks out a lost

lamb or the woman who searches every corner of the house for the lost coin, and when she finds it, she has a party with her friends. And here he approaches the disciples. This is important because it shows us that we are in the care of a savior who seeks us out. We don't have to worry about grabbing God by the tail because God already has us in the palm of his hands. Even Peter who denied Jesus three times – here Jesus approaches him and invites him back to his original calling.

Remember that original calling? Peter was fishing and Jesus invited him to “Follow me,” and then commissioned him to be fishing for people. And now, after all that has happened – you know, the drama of three years, the ups and downs, the lows and the highs, the crowds and the healings, the torture, the betrayal, the death, the burial, the resurrection – all of this and Jesus is back on the same shores of Lake Galilee, reconciling with Peter, restoring Peter to fellowship and friendship with him, and giving Peter renewed purpose and renewed belonging.

That we are in the care of a savior who seeks us out is important for a second reason: it gives us the courage to obey our commission – to love others, to seek the lost and lonely and to feed the sheep – even if we aren't perfect. If imperfect Peter can do it, we can do it. How? The same way that Jesus did it. We can't wait for people to come to us. We can't sound an alarm and expect people to show up. We have to approach people in love, respect, humility and in the name of Jesus.

What amazes me about Jesus was that he was able to see the gift in each person and then to invite each person to join him in using it. Can't we do the same?

Do you remember the Easter Egg-stravaganza of several weeks ago? It was so wonderful to see how you showed up not just to help, but also in a spirit of love, joy, and compassion. You couldn't help but feel the love. One little boy was so thrilled with the crafts and games and then the egg hunt that he proclaimed, “This is the best day of my life!” How wonderful it was that we could help make it the best day of his life. Everyone has a gift they can share in order to help others have the best day of their life. It happens as we see people as Jesus sees them and connect heart to heart and then invite them to use that gift to help others.

Think of all the various ministries and missions of our church. People are always saying to me, “Your church does so much.” We do! But there's always room for more. There is always the need for more. How about inviting some people you know to join you in doing what you already do through the church? Our true being and the hope of the world are found in loving relationships, not in isolation. We need to keep making connections with people. People don't need our opinions; they need our love, our hearts, our hands, our witness of faith. And when we meet based on love and obedience to Jesus, life-giving connections are made, in just the way that Jesus made them. And there is reconciliation, renewed purposes, a comforting sense of belonging, and most of all new life.