

“Will You Come and Follow Me?”

John 21:1-19

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I want to share a story with you. Jim had an awful day fishing on the lake, sitting in the blazing sun all day without catching a single fish. On his way home, he stopped at the supermarket and ordered four catfish. He told the fish salesman, "Pick four large ones out and throw them at me, will you?" "Why do you want me to throw them at you?" "Because I want to tell my wife that I caught them." "Okay, but I suggest that you take the rainbow trout." "But why?" "Because your wife came in earlier today and said that if you came by, I should tell you to take rainbow trout. She prefers that for supper tonight."

I just imagine how Peter and his fishing colleagues would feel when they have caught nothing from daytime to nighttime. And what if their family members were waiting to have fish? What would have they done for their family? Probably Peter and his fishing colleagues would have felt the same way as Jim wanting to buy fish at the supermarket on the way home!

Today's Scripture reading has almost the same story as last Sunday's. One big difference between these two gospels is the time. Whereas the gospel of Luke's account took place at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, John's account happened at the end after Jesus was resurrected from the dead. If we go a little further in this story, we also find a similarity between the narratives. Both accounts are focused on Peter's calling and re-commissioning him as a disciple. Luke's story describes Peter's first calling into Jesus' ministry three years before but now Jesus appears to Peter and asks him to carry on His mission. Interestingly, in our Scripture story, fishing plays an important role as a conduit helping Peter recall his calling and enabling him to recognize Jesus as the Lord. This morning, I invite us to explore the deeper meaning of fishing and find out Jesus' real purpose as to why he appeared to Peter and his disciples.

I invite you to pay special attention to verse 3. Peter talked to his friends and fishing colleagues saying, "I am fishing!" and his friends responded, "We will go with you". What really did Peter mean by saying, "I am going fishing?" I don't have the right answer for you, but we can imagine being in Peter's shoes. Let us practice our theological imagination! When Jesus called Peter three years earlier, Peter ambitiously said "yes" to Jesus. Jesus invited him to fish for people. Jesus' fishing was a metaphoric expression for the experience of fullness, abundance and blessings in his life. It was a new dream for God's new

kingdom. For three years, Peter had willingly followed Jesus, prayed with him and dreamed God's kingdom with him. Peter was ready to dedicate his whole life. But when he realized that Jesus was humbly going to die on the cross, he was greatly disappointed in Jesus. Peter felt betrayed by his master's helpless attitude facing crucifixion. He denied Jesus three times and he wasn't even there at the cross at Calvary. He may have wanted an almighty Messiah to bring fortune and prosperity to him and his people. Peter returned home to Galilee and went back to his past routine for 'fishing'.

Today's reading ironically describes the same experience that Peter and his disciples had experienced when meeting Jesus three years ago. On this night, Peter and his colleagues went fishing, but they caught nothing. Then, a stranger came and instructed them to do something differently in their fishing. The Bible says that Peter and disciples were able to catch many fish and the disciples realized that the stranger was Jesus, their Lord. Literally, they experienced a miraculous change from emptiness to abundance with Jesus' presence. I am sure this experience helped them recall the first encounter with Jesus and the memory of taking fullness and abundance with Jesus when they met Jesus for the first time. Now, Jesus appeared to Peter and the other disciples and helped them re-experience the same transformative moment to change their lives from emptiness to abundance, from a meaningless life to a meaningful life, and from daily routine to exciting adventure to fish for people. What really happened to change them and re-commission them to be engaged back to Jesus' mission?

Ando Shusaku, an imaginative and theological writer, in her novel "The Life of Jesus Christ" explains a reason of how Peter and his disciples were able to turn around and re-commission to become Jesus' committed disciples. According to her, she assumed that Peter and most disciples were not at the cross when Jesus died. They were disappointed in Jesus and they ran away or decided to return back home, but at the same time, she also imagined that Peter and other disciples had to deal with feelings of guilt, abandonment, and shame about their master and Savior. Ando stimulates our imagination, arguing when Jesus says, "Lord, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing" that he was actually speaking to the disciples who had deserted him and not to all of mankind. The disciples were the first to believe in him but they were the first to abandon him. They heard from mouth to mouth that Jesus forgave them. It touched Peter's heart and other disciples' hearts as well. They in turn devoted their lives to Jesus Christ again. Jesus' unconditional love transformed their lives. His message carried on because the disciples came back and continued to deliver his words to others.

The purpose of Jesus' appearance to Peter and his disciples for the third

time was to remind them of his purpose of ministry, death and resurrection. The point of Jesus' message is to fish for people. In our Scripture reading, Jesus asked Peter to feed my lambs and feed my sheep. What Jesus meant by 'fishing' in our Scripture story is not catching fish for our daily routine, but fishing for people, feeding people by the love of God. The metaphor of fishing is not simply feeding the hungry, but it is a transformative experience of being loved and cared for by our acts of love that Jesus taught us to do. Jesus said to Peter, "If you really say that you love me, then feed my lambs." He emphasized this three times, which means that he really meant it.

Therefore, the purpose of our church is very clear: First of all, we must reach out to our neighbors and let them know that we are here as their spiritual home. As Jesus appeared to his disciples three times, we need to make our intentional efforts to be known to our community and feed their souls as their neighbor church. Secondly, we have to find out ways of how to make our neighbors feel welcomed to come and join us for their spiritual growth. Jesus asked us to tend His sheep and people out there are hungry for spiritual guidance and support. For those who feel lacking and emptiness in their lives, we are called to help them experience blessings of abundance and fullness in Jesus Christ. Lastly, we should not forget that Jesus commissioned us to tend His sheep serving our neighbors. Indeed, we are all called to serve our neighbors and community as Jesus has served us. It is time to turn our eyes from ourselves to our neighbors. Jesus is still inviting each one of us to follow him and continue to carry on his dream and ministry as he appeared to Peter and his disciples at Galilee. I hope and pray that we all say, "Yes, Lord, we will go with you!" Amen.