

Wesley United Methodist Church                      Rev. Beverly E Stenmark  
May 5, 2019 – 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter  
Title: Follow Me  
Scripture: Acts 9:1-6  
John 21:1-19

Today we hear about another of Jesus' post resurrection appearances. You may remember that last week, we heard about Jesus appearing to his disciples while they were locked in a room, scared for their lives. Thomas, one of the disciples was not with them and didn't believe the others when they told him that they had seen Jesus. I talked about Thomas and said that he would make one more appearance in the gospel. We see him today, with 6 other disciples by the Sea of Tiberias.

The disciples are still trying to figure out what is going on. Their lives have been turned upside down. As we often do when life is confusing, Peter looks for something familiar and announces that he is going fishing. At least two of the other disciples were also fishermen by trade and so they all decided to go with Peter. They fished all night, but they didn't catch any fish.

In the morning, just after daybreak, they saw a man on the beach. The man somehow knowing that they had not caught any fish, told them to cast the net on the other side of the boat. For whatever reason, they decided to do what he told them to do and they caught so many fish that they had trouble hauling in all the fish.

It was at this point that the disciple John recognized who it was and announced to Peter, "It is the Lord." It is a common occurrence in the post-resurrection appearances that the disciples do not recognize Jesus immediately. They don't recognize him until he does something familiar. At the graveside, Mary did not recognize Jesus until he spoke her name.

For the disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke's Gospel, it was when Jesus broke the bread as he had done on the night of the Last Supper. Now, for Peter, James, and John it is when they catch a miraculous amount of fish after following the direction of a man standing on the shore.

Peter, James and John had experienced a miraculous catch once before. It is described in Luke's gospel in the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter. After that experience, Peter, James and John left their boats and their fishing careers to follow Jesus. Rev. Annie Lockhart-Gilroy, writing in the General Board of Discipleship Worship notes for today, describes today's Gospel story as an updated call.<sup>i</sup>

The first time Jesus invited them to follow him, they didn't really know what they were getting into but now they have a better sense of the ministry and what it means to follow Jesus. But now, they will need to learn what it "means to follow and serve Jesus without Jesus being physically present with them. Instead of being taught by Jesus, they are now called to teach and to live into what they have been taught. This is a new phase of their call and ministry."

She notes that we are often so preoccupied that we miss the movement of Jesus right in front of us. "Maybe it is because he doesn't look the way we think he would. Maybe it is because we don't expect to see him work. We don't always recognize Jesus, but Jesus knows how to make himself familiar to his disciples. It isn't the same for everyone, but he knows us so well that it can be custom-made."<sup>ii</sup>

The way that I recognize Jesus' presence may be very different for me than it is for you. Some of us immediately recognize Jesus' presence when we are by the water or absorbed in an inspiring piece of music. Some of us may be quick to recognize Jesus in the presence of another

person – either someone who does something helpful for us, or in the face of someone who is in deep need and for whom we are called to be Jesus' hands and feet. The way that Jesus makes himself known to us is different for different people and at different times in our lives.

In this story, we once again see Jesus caring for his disciples. He knows that the disciples are tired and hungry, and he prepares breakfast for them. He cooks for them, eats with them, and spends time just being with them. The best way to really get to know a person is to simply spend time with that person.

How often do we take time to just be with Jesus, to just be in Jesus' presence? In following Jesus, we are certainly called to do the work that Jesus calls us to, but we are also called to simply be with him. I have always believed that churches need to pay attention to both the being and the doing in our lives together. We absolutely need times when we are busy doing God's work, but we also need time when we are simply sitting with each other, enjoying each other's company and getting to know each other.

The times before or after an event can be important times to connect with someone. Washing dishes, cooking eggs or chopping vegetables together can help us get to know people in ways that may never happen if all of our connections are of a more formal nature. I learned this early on in ministry. While serving a small church, several of us were chopping vegetables and preparing for a church dinner when a woman suddenly shared with us a very important part of her life story – something that no one else in the room knew.

I am sure that she would never have come to my office to speak to me as her pastor, but in the informality and companionship of the kitchen,

she felt safe enough and comfortable enough to share something very important to her. She discovered that she did not need to face this by herself and that there were others who were willing and wanting to walk with her during her very difficult time.

Most of the rest of this story focuses on Peter and his conversation with Jesus after breakfast. The night that Jesus was betrayed, their conversation had focused on the upcoming reality that Peter would deny three times that night that he even knew who Jesus was. Now, Jesus asks him, “Peter, do you love me?”

Peter responded, “Yes, Lord; you now that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” The question and answer are repeated two times more. Surely Jesus knew that Peter loved him, but it may have been that Peter needed to be reminded. Peter was likely still feeling guilty about denying Jesus three times. Now each denial is matched with an opportunity to confess his love.

Jesus is not content to just have Peter profess his love. Jesus uses the opportunity to remind Peter of the call that he initially gave to Peter. Jesus tells Peter to “Feed my lambs, Tend my sheep, and Feed my sheep.” Jesus reminds us that we are called to care for all those that he loves and that he loves all! “Throughout Scripture, we see that loving God and loving neighbor are inextricable actions. One cannot love God if one does not love neighbor, for one’s neighbor is also of God. God loves them as much as God loves you (and me). So, (we) care for them because God loves them, and the, too, belong to God. Love is an action verb. It is not enough to say that the other people know that they are loved. Love must be followed with action.”<sup>iii</sup>

Peter and the other disciples had already been following Jesus for three years, but Jesus ends the conversation with the command, “Follow me.” From now on though, they will not get to follow Jesus in the literal way of walking with him and going places with him. Jesus will no longer be with them in person. They won’t get to touch him and listen to him in the same way that they have been.

Following now will be different. It will be the same way that we are called to follow Jesus. They, and we, are still to follow his teachings. They, and we, will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to carry on his work, even though he is no longer physically with us. This is the invitation to discipleship that Jesus makes to us. We are to follow, and we are to be a member of Jesus’ flock. “To live for Jesus is to follow Jesus.”

Our Scripture today also included the story of Saul or Paul who was persecuting the followers of Jesus. He believed that he was serving God and doing the right thing by trying to keep Judaism pure and defending it from the radical teacher Jesus and his followers. A dramatic encounter on the road to Damascus quickly showed Saul that he was wrong.

Later Saul, or Paul, would be commissioned, just as Peter was to play a central role in expanding and strengthening the church. Our God is a God of second chances; patiently and skillfully restoring those who have fallen and providing new opportunities for them – for us. New opportunities to follow faithfully. New opportunities for fruitful service. New opportunities to live up our own best intentions.

We are still being called continually by Jesus. The question for us is both individual and corporate. Where are you being called by Jesus? How is Jesus calling you to follow? What is God calling you to do now?

The question is also for us as a congregation. Where have we been called by Jesus in the past? Where is God calling us to go now? What is God calling us to do now? In what ways do we tend and feed Jesus' flock because we love him? Are we paying more attention to certain parts of Jesus' flock and ignoring other parts of Jesus' flock?

These are part of the questions that we as a congregation are trying to discern in this year. This is part of what the Next Chapter team is trying to guide us into discussing and discerning. It is something that all of us – as individuals and as a congregation – are being asked.

Personally, our answers will be different. What God is calling me to do may be very different than what God is calling you to do. However, our individual calls come together as a call to this congregation, this body of Christ gathered here to worship, to serve, to follow Jesus.

Just as the disciples experienced a new call to follow Jesus after the resurrection, we are also called to follow. The Gospel story also serves as a metaphor for ministry and mission. When the disciples were fishing on their own, they caught nothing. But when they fished as Jesus told them to, their efforts yielded amazing results. Let us also seek to be faithful in listening to the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we go fishing and follow him.

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<sup>i</sup> Lockhart-Gilroy, Annie. [www.gbod.org/worship](http://www.gbod.org/worship) Easter Part 1- Living, To Live for Jesus is to Follow Jesus.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid