

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Apr 10th 2016

So they left the presence of the Sanhedrin,

rejoicing that they had been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name. Acts 5

And when he had said this, he said to him, "Follow me." John 21

I love the story from Acts. I've always been in awe of those Apostles who were so filled with the Spirit that they left this humiliating experience of being hauled up before the religious leaders and left rejoicing - seeing it as a privileged opportunity to share an intimacy with their Lord, in the dishonor of it all. I have often prayed, as I did today, that I might be drawn into a deeper love for our Lord and into a deeper freedom that I might rejoice, rather than grumble, at experiences which appear costly to me, in service of his name.

And I really love this gospel. It is one of my favorite resurrection stories. I love the way it begins. Peter decides he is going to return to fishing - his former life. I am always struck by how quickly, after a religious celebration, even a religious experience, like Easter, that I so quickly return to my former life and its patterns. The joy of Easter doesn't seem to last, nor does its fire and mission.

I love it that Jesus re-calls Peter by repeating the way he called him the first time. (I don't know whether it is true, but I like to assume that John's community knew there was a tradition - in Luke 5 - whether they read it or not.) So, it is wonderful to imagine that Jesus calls Peter to leave his fishing and to follow him - after the resurrection - the same way he first called him. Both times, after a night of fishing, when Peter's abilities didn't net any fish, Jesus' simple direction fills the nets to bursting. And, Peter recognizes that it is his Lord, risen from the dead. It reminds me that I often need to be renewed in my call, and my ability to recognize the Lord right before me, by remembering how I was first called. I need to be re-newed and re-animated by the memory that Jesus has much more power than I do. And, especially when I sense that my nets are pretty empty, I need to jump in the water and swim to the shore to get closer to the one who can fill any empty nets - the Lord who can fill any emptiness.

When Peter gets to shore, Jesus is making him breakfast - providing food and nourishment is another reminder of who he is - and Jesus asks him to add Peter's catch to the grill. I want to never forget that my real food is from the Lord. I also want to always remember that his wonderful gifts to me will be part of that banquet.

Now comes the really great part. Jesus asks Peter three times if Peter loves him. Peter is sad that Jesus asks him three times - surely remembering the three times he denied even knowing Jesus out of fear of getting caught up in his arrest and crucifixion. Each time Peter professes that he genuinely loves the Lord - not only answering the question but deepening his response each time, Jesus tells him what the love means: "Feed my sheep." Loving Jesus means, loving those he cares for. Though I've denied knowing him time after time - or seriously forgetting about it now and again - Jesus leads me into realizing and deepening in a sense of how much I really do love him. And, the real fruit of that communion is a love which leads to imitation. If I fall in love with Jesus, I fall in love with the way he is. I fall in love with his style of loving - desiring to imitate him in feeding his sheep. My desire to be with him grows into a desire to be like him.

Finally, Jesus reminds Peter that in his past he went where he wanted to go and did what he wanted to do. This intimacy with Jesus will involve a communion with him in surrender to the Father's plan. It is so easy for me to think that my life, and its direction, is in my hands. It is consoling to accept that my life is in God's hands. That surrender is the closest way I can find the intimacy with Jesus that I really desire. When I hear Jesus say "follow me," I want to say "yes, Amen, thank you" more and more deeply, sensing what it means with deeper freedom and rejoicing at the privilege of sharing in the journey of my Savior and Lord.

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