

“A Time of Presence”

Isaiah 42:1-9; 1 Corinthians 11:23-34;  
John 21:1-14

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In many ways, the season of Easter is about encountering God—the encounters people have with Jesus after he has been resurrected. We had a description last week of Jesus breathing on the disciples, giving them some life. You might expect, as John goes forward, that we might hear that the disciples are off into ministry. Yet, it seems that they are still together and wondering, “Well, what’s next?” They’re not sure exactly what to do.

It feels kind of appropriate that Peter just jumps in and decides that he’s got to do something, so he goes back to what he knew. He simply decides to go fishing. That was his profession, so he decides to go back to it and try it again. It’s interesting to me that the other disciples decide to go, too. Maybe something of what Jesus had done was already beginning to catch on, because they realized that sense of being together and doing this activity together was important. Yet, as it is many times when you try to go back to something you think you have had in the past and want to try again, going back is often hard. Things have changed. People have changed. You find it is not quite what you expected. I wonder how many times Peter wondered during the night, “Why aren’t we catching any fish? I know how to do this.” But when morning comes, they have not caught a thing.

I’m reminded that this happened to them once before. If you read Luke 5, there is a description there of them also not having any luck fishing. This guy comes along and suggests they let their nets down one more time. That time they talk back and say, “Hey, we’ve done this all night. It’s not going to be worth it.” But he says, “Go ahead and do it.” And again, they catch a lot of fish. That was at the beginning. That was when they were first getting to know Jesus.

This time, maybe there’s something in their psyche that suggests, “This time, let’s not talk back. Let’s just try it.” And they do. In that catch, they recognize that the one over there on the seashore may be somebody special.

Sometimes when we’re living our lives and things don’t seem to be going correctly, I can get into such a surety that I know what I’m doing and eventually it will work. (Thank you for laughing at that.) The trouble is I need a voice from outside to help me see things differently. I don’t always understand. I can’t always see what’s next. Sometimes I wonder if it’s a little that way for the disciples. They have never been apostles. They don’t know what apostleship is. They don’t know what it means for Jesus to be calling them to something new. That’s the way with something new—you don’t see it because you haven’t done it before, so sometimes it’s hard to take those steps into that new place. That’s when it’s helpful to have a voice from outside that invites us or helps us see that we can try.

There was something about catching all those fish, experiencing something good, that made the disciple whom Jesus loved—that's the way John likes to describe the one who seems to "get" Jesus—say, "It's the Lord!" So, when the Lord appears in their lives, what do they do? Peter decides he wants to be there. He wants to be with the Lord again. I love that about Peter. He loves to jump in.

Sometimes we think of ourselves a little bit like Peter, but for me, Peter is the one who jumps in and I'm probably the one who stands back and says, "I need to think about this a little bit." Sometimes when I think that I may have heard the Lord's voice, I'm not so sure I'm quite as ready to jump in. I sometimes wonder if in fact, I think, "I'm not sure I really heard him." Why might I say that? Because oftentimes I already have plans. I already think I know where I'm going and when I hear God's voice in some way, sometimes it feels a little like, "Uh-oh. I'm going to go somewhere different."

There's a question that comes to my mind: How much do I trust the voice of God? How much do I trust what Jesus is doing? How much do I trust that God really wants to take us to somewhere good, that he wants to lead us into a life that's full, that he wants to lead us to a new way of life and a new way of being. I'm pretty attached to the old way a lot of the time. Sometimes I wish I could be a little bit more like Peter and feel like I can just jump in.

But not all the disciples jump in. The rest of them pull in the fish. They take care of business, as Jesus invites them to come. He gathers them at breakfast and it is at that time they have that full recognition that he is there, and he is with them, and that he again is offering them a meal. It is almost a way of saying, "Don't worry about what's next. Come and experience this time, this moment where you can be sustained and restored to your discipleship, and know that you are mine, that you are a beloved family of faith."

There's a way that they go from "what's next?" to a reorientation, recognizing God's presence with them. It's so easy to get on with life and not look, not hear, not recognize those moments when Jesus is calling, when something good really happens and invites us to recognize that God might be present. God might be at work in our lives in some way. God might be inviting us to come near and to know the sustenance that God wants us to have, the ways of life God wants to give us.

It's interesting that all the things that happen in this story are pretty regular kinds of things. It was surprising that they caught the fish the time Jesus invited them to cast their nets again, but catching fish is what they were trying to do anyway. It wasn't something extraordinary in terms of a completely new and different activity. It was part of what they were doing. They come in and meet with him and have a conversation. They have some breakfast. What's so extraordinary about that, except that God was present? God was present in the very ordinariness of their lives, meeting them in a way that gave them the very thing they needed. Showing them again the servanthood of Christ. Giving them breakfast—they must have been hungry. Recreating them as a fellowship, a body.

So we have recognized that in our own way of celebrating communion. We are invited to recognize God is with us, and that God feeds us, sustains us, frees us, gives us new life. We use the table as a representation of that, both reminding us of what Jesus has done and inviting us to know that we are fed again today, and that the Spirit of God is with us and God is among us. God's voice is calling out to us. God's goodness can be seen.

We are invited to be part of God's family. Maybe as we do that, we really will become a light to the nations, that the goodness of God will be expressed through us as a fellowship of faith, as a body of Christ. We are invited to notice where in our lives Jesus might be calling us, the good we might be seeing where God might be at work, to recognize God's presence among us and how that presence embraces us and invites us to eat together, to be in fellowship. Amen.