Third Sunday of Easter

April 14, 2013

John opens the story with, “After this, Jesus revealed himself.” I don’t know precisely what “after this” means. Maybe nothing. But, I know that Jesus was revealing himself after his death on the cross. It took place on a very bad Friday that turned out to be a Good Friday. Jesus revealed himself after his burial in that grave. After the stone moved, and the dead body stirred in the darkness, the Light of the World walked into the dawn of an everlasting day. Christ is risen. Indeed, he is risen.

He “revealed himself to his disciples.” The seven were privileged to be there. John, who was one of them, tells us that they were “at the Sea of Tiberius.” The disciples of Jesus knew this lake by heart, and they had returned to it after the stunning events of an awful weekend in Jerusalem. This lake in Galilee was the location where Simon and Andrew, James and John were called by Jesus. It was here that they cut the lifelines to family and livelihood to follow him. It was here that Jesus walked on the water and woke up to still a storm, and the miracle overwhelmed them. It was here on the land near the shore, that he fed five thousand people with five loaves and a few fish.

The Sea of Galilee was home, and Peter said, “I’m going fishing,” where he often fished before. No wonder the others joined him. They knew the place like the back of their hands. They were there at night on a lake, “but that night they caught nothing.” It was surely a letdown for them, at home in a way, with cautious hope after being through so much. None of them with too much to feel good about, the night of nothing was a good take on the way they were.

But soon the dawn that dared all darkness was standing on the shore, in the first light of the morning. They saw Jesus, but they didn’t recognize him. He spoke and said, “Have you caught anything to eat?” To their “no,” he suggested, “Cast the net over the right side of the boat.” After struggling all night, and nothing to show, it is amazing that they heeded this stranger’s advice. But, it was a new day.

It is wonderful, the way that God works with us, guiding us to do things that have greater outcomes around the bend of our journey. Thus, the disciples cast their net over the starboard side, as they were told, and brought up a miracle. The haul was huge. Too much in every way. A wondrous realization dawned on John. “It is the Lord,” he said to Peter, who couldn’t wait to see Jesus. He jumped into the water to get there first.

The seven heard Jesus say, “Bring some of the fish you just caught.” It was a call for them and for us, so that the “fruit of the earth and the work of human hands” might be part of a universal offering to God. “Lord, I am not worthy,” we say. The seven unworthy and uneasy disciples had storms in their souls like the Sea of Galilee. In his hour of greatest need, they slept when they should have watched. They all ran at the first sign of danger, and Peter, chosen to be the rock-solid one, waffled more than any. He cursed and he swore that he never knew Jesus. We all stand in that lousy line-up of desertion and denial at one level or another. How often we stand by the self, and not by Christ, who loves us, who suffered terribly and died torturously to save us from darkness and death.

But now on the shore, at one of the lowest levels of land and lake on earth, there at a very low level of shame and regret, Jesus had three words for the seven, who sat with him at the last Supper they had, and then deserted him. Three words, “Come, have breakfast.” Then, “they knew it was the Lord.” After breakfast, Jesus singled out Peter and addressed him. Until this moment of individual focus, their eyes probably had not met in any deep connection, since the cock crowed after his denials, and “the Lord turned and looked at Peter.” Now, three separate times, Jesus asked him, “Do you love me?” Three times, he asked, one for each deeply wounding denial. By the third time, Peter was hurt “that he said to him a third time, ‘Do you love me?’” One could almost feel the plea in his voice as he said, “Lord you know everything. You know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.”

Peter is one changed man. He courageously tells the high priest, no less, and the Sanhedrin that, “The God of our ancestors raised Jesus, though you had him killed by hanging him on a tree.” Now, Peter is back as the rock. Fearless and faithful. He would never waver again. He ended his days martyred in Rome, as Jesus died, succeeded now by the humble Francis, 266 popes later.

We continue to meet the Lord in the breaking of the Bread. And he continues to remind us in the same breaking of the Bread what our lives are all about: our bodies given for others, our blood poured out for others. Jesus continues to ask: Do you love me? And then, in one way or another, to follow up with: “Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep.” So let’s try to pay attention. There are lots of people who need caring for out there. And he looks to this community here for some help. Let Easter continue to be lived out in our lives!

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