

Easter 3 5/5/19
John 21:1-19 C

SERMON TEXT IS THE APPOINTED GOSPEL READING FOR THIS SUNDAY, FROM THE 21ST CHAPTER OF JOHN'S GOSPEL

If anybody knows that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, it's Peter. After all, on that first day of the week, when Mary Magdalene came and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb," it was Peter who got up, ran to the tomb, went inside and saw the burial cloths lying there, neatly folded (cf. John 20). That same day at night, Peter and the rest of the disciples were in a locked-up house for fear of the Jews, and the Lord Jesus appeared to them. Then, after eight days after that, Peter and the disciples were again together, this time Thomas was with them and, once again, Jesus appeared to them. So, if anyone should know Jesus was risen from the dead, it's Simon Peter.

To that joyous Easter announcement, "Christ is risen," Peter says, "I'm going fishing." Fishing. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. Sin, death, and the devil have been defeated. Forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are ours. Peter has seen the living Savior. His response to that? I'm going fishing. And, he's not alone because Thomas, Nathanael, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples say we're going to go with you.

The resurrection of the dead has taken place. Christ is risen. This news of great joy is earth shattering. But, they're going back to live life like Jesus' resurrection from the dead never happened. They're going back to do what they've always done. They're just going fishing.

Incredible, isn't it? No, not really. Here's why: Everybody knows Jesus has risen from the dead. Do you? You were here on Easter

Sunday. You heard the pronouncement that the grave was empty and Christ is risen. The Sunday after that, you saw the hands and the side of the risen Lord. Every Sunday you walk into His house, you encounter the living Jesus Christ. Every time you heard His Word, read and proclaimed; there He is – the resurrected Jesus Christ. So, we ask that Lutheran question: What does this mean? What does this mean for you, Dear Child of God?

For Peter, it means “I’m going fishing”. In other words, I’m just going back to do what I’ve always done. I’m going to live in a way that shows the resurrection of Jesus – as earth shattering as it was – really didn’t happen. Why is that? Why do you and Peter and the rest of the boys so often act as though the resurrection of Jesus Christ never happened at all? Why is that?

Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, the sons of Zebedee, and all the disciples made some pretty big promises to Jesus when they were in the upper room celebrating the Passover. They all said, Lord we are ready to go with you to prison and to death. But, when the mob showed up with swords and clubs to arrest Jesus, they ran away from Jesus as fast as their little feet would go. It was Peter who said he would die with Jesus, and it was this same Peter who was asked three times if he knew Jesus and, three times, he denied Jesus. He feels it too. His guilt is great; His embarrassment, His shame are heavy. And now Jesus is risen from the dead and could – could – it be the reason he acts like nothing has happened is because He thinks this Easter, this forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, are not for me. My sin is too great, my failure too huge, my embarrassment and shame too heavy. Easter, Easter really isn’t for me. You ever feel like that?

You know that feeling because you made the same promises the disciples did. You promised that you would suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from your Lord Jesus Christ. But you know all-too-well that doesn't always happen. Often, you fall away, you fall hard, and you fall fast. Satan comes in, peer pressure come sin, your desire to be better than your neighbor at any cost. Then, it hits you -- you've denied Him. Your guilt, your shame, your embarrassment, your sin is just as heavy and ugly as Peter's was. Then this message of Easter comes along, and you say, it's just not for me. My sin is too great; my shame, my embarrassment is all too heavy, I may just as well go fishing, just keep doing what it is I've always done. If that's the way you feel, listen to Jesus in our Gospel this morning.

As Peter and the boys are out fishing, as you are out doing what you've always done, Jesus comes along and says, "Do you have any fish?" That's His way of pointing out to you that it's not going so well. Things aren't working out for you. No, they're not. What do you expect Jesus to say? You're living like Jesus never rose from the dead. Then Jesus says, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." And when they do do that, they catch a huge quantity of fish, 153 in all. When that happens, John says, "It is the Lord," and Peter jumps in the water and swims to shore so that he can be with Jesus.

Do you recall when Jesus and Peter first met? Simon had been out fishing all night and had not caught a single fish. Jesus told him to let out his net, and, lo and behold, he caught a large number of fish. And he calls Simon to follow Him. It's Deja vu all over again. Jesus is using the catch of fish to bring Peter back, to teach him that this Easter, this forgiveness, life, and salvation, really are for him.

You know what's really great about it? Jesus said exactly the same thing to you this morning. That's what He did when the words, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" were spoken over you. With those words, Jesus takes you right back to the place He met you -- the font of your baptism, where He gave you forgiveness of sins, rescued you from death and the devil, gave you eternal salvation, and called to you, "Follow Me". And it worked pretty well -- because here you are, once again this morning, so that you can be with Jesus, eat with Him, and speak with Him.

When it comes to speaking with Jesus about Easter, listen to what He says to Peter,

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep ... Follow Me."

Not exactly the conversation you would expect, is it? What we would expect -- because this is more like what you would do -- is something much more like: "Hey, Peter, what's with the promises? You denied me three times. You ran away from me. I don't have time for people like you. I'm done with people like you."

But, that's not at all what we hear from Jesus. We don't hear from Jesus pointing out to Peter what Peter already knew -- His sins are great, his shame and embarrassment are heavy. What we hear from Jesus are

words of forgiveness, words of comfort, words of restoration. A call to once again follow Him.

Jesus has the exact same conversation with you this morning. It happened right after the words, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” After the Invocation, Jesus was, in essence, asking you, “Do you love me?” And you said, “Yes, Lord, I love you but I’ve done it imperfectly, not as I should. I fallen away from you in what I’ve thought, what I’ve said, what I’ve done, and by what I’ve left undone. All this I’ve done, but I do love you.” And then Jesus’ conversation with you goes much as it did with Peter, there comes a word of forgiveness, a word of comfort, a word of joy and peace, “I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Those words, and in the reading and learning of His Word, and in His Supper that He gives you to eat and to drink, there is Jesus saying to you, “Let me tell you about your sin, about your shame, about your embarrassment, it’s not too big or too heavy that my death upon the cross and Easter resurrection the 3rd day has not wiped it all away. No matter what you have done or left undone, my love for you in my death and resurrection has completely and totally taken all your sin, and shame, and embarrassment away.”

That’s what Jesus says to you this very day. What He’s really saying is the same thing He said to Peter, “Easter is for you!”