

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

There are two separate themes in this Sunday's gospel reading, and both take place after the Resurrection. While the first seems to focus around the general activity of fishing, the second uses extensive imagery of the shepherd and his flock of sheep. It seems to be a stretch to find a common theme or connection to them.....so, which way should the sermon go?

Is there a connection? Well, I think so...but let us start out this way.

By a show of hands, how many here have gone fishing? How many enjoy recreational fishing?

I have shared this before, but it bears repeating.

Back in the very early 1970s, my very first job as a high school kid outside of the family was working in a fishing marina complex up on Black Lake in St. Lawrence County. The lake had a reputation of almost-mythic proportions of being one of the best, if not THE best, lake in the Northeast for walleye pike. Yet, by the time I was there as a kid, the lake had also acquired a large population of pan fish...perch, sunfish and the like.

In that bait and tackle shop, over literally hundreds of encounters with the public, I remember that every weekend was the same thing, no matter what. As one wave of week-long vacationing fishermen would pull out and head home, another wave...led by Joe Blow Fisherman, along with his buddies or his family...would pull in, dreaming of a solid week dead ahead of nothing but fishing. Joe Blow just wanted to know one thing, and he was looking at me, this raw kid:

“What are they biting on?” “What did the fish hit on last week?”

I personally cannot...and could not...fish to save my life. But, at that time, I could tell anyone else how to do it on that lake, based on the collective chatter from the week before. I could have sold those guys the dustiest lure on the pegboard wall. And they would not have cared! Here they are...on vacation!! All excited to be on vacation...and they were standing in front of me, just a kid...looking for someone to empower them in their fishing dream.

Someone to empower them. Anyone. Even a kid....to excite them further. Someone to show them “the way” to the fishing holes...where they wanted to go. Again, I could not fish to save my life.

I do not know if Jesus could fish to save his life either. After all, He was a carpenter, a wood worker. What did he know about fishing?

What we **do** know is that this story begins with the familiar. Look at this gospel closely.

You and I are no different. When we feel at our most vulnerable, at our most unsteady, we go to

our “safe place”. We do the things that we enjoy the most, the things that give us the most peace.

Here are these former fishermen...who spent all their lives perfecting their craft, until Jesus called them to drop their nets...leave their familiar lives and comfort zones....to follow him. Follow him they did...for a good three years...and then? Then he gets killed on the cross...and they, all of a sudden, have lost their direction. The very meaning of their lives is gone. No hope. No future.

So, what do they do? Simon Peter answers with his default setting...go back to the beginning. To what is safe and secure, and maybe it will clear up. But, for now....he says, “I am going fishing. Back to the basics.”

And, again, Jesus the carpenter...not the fisherman...shows up, but they do not know him. The gospels do not tell us...and, in today’s gospel, maybe Jesus just got lucky, telling them to toss the net on the other side. Like me all those years ago, telling those far better expert fishermen where to go and what to do...and having no personal basis to do so. And yet, Simon Peter and the boys hauled in 153 large fish. I like the detail of the exact number...153...which adds authenticity/credibility to the story.

This gospel message tells us of Jesus...back from the dead. They saw him on the cross, and laid in the tomb. And, now...he is back among them. Beyond belief, he is back and...doing what? Showing his love and concern for them. Inviting them to join him at a breakfast meal...to break bread with him. Reminding them, in effect, that God is with them....and with us...far more often than every time we sit down to eat.

This gospel message tells us of Jesus...the carpenter, the wood worker showing them the way to the fishing hole. He does NOT show US the way to successful fishing, because fishing is not what we do next to breathing. Going fishing is NOT OUR second nature.

But what it DOES means to us is that the spirit of Jesus reaches out to us...all of us. By telling these fellows to do the ordinary in another way...to cast the net to the right side of the boat, he tells us to go about our lives....day by day...in a different way. To try it another way. To be creative within the compassion, and caring, and sensitivity that God’s Holy Spirit whispers...or screams...to us.

Our world churns on, day after day, in various forms of strife, and agony, and suffering. We live in a culture, a world of wanton sex, of violence, of horror, of suspense, of drama. We do NOT live in, or know, a culture or a world of peace, of love, of compassion, of mutual respect.

Jesus wants us to do it differently. To live life another way. Away from all of that...the despair, the violence, the disruption, the drama that our lives often drop into.

And that is the connection into the second part of this gospel reading. Jesus calls on Simon

Peter....and all of us, in various forms of ministry, and in differing leadership roles within the church.
To be diligent. To be creative. To be persistent.

In all in the ways that we minister to each other, in the name of Christ, and in the ways that we use and enjoy the blessings of God's creation all around us and within us.

So, on this day...the Third Sunday of Easter...in the Easter season...we are reminded of new life, of new possibilities. It is the old story being retold, refreshed and now new. Being relived over and over again, but not the same as before..so new again. Jesus points us to a different way of living life, all in a very calm and loving and reassuring way.

And just as he invited those disciples to come ashore and have breakfast with him, so he does the same today by inviting you and me, and all of us to the Lord's table this morning to share with him.

The earliest Christians were actually known as "followers of the Way". If we are able to follow his way of living life, and do so with open hearts and full faith, we will encounter others who come to find and know....what? It is finding others seeking life with the same passion, the same joy, and the same intensity as those Joe Blow Fishermen who came to my counter at that bait and tackle shop. Not knowing or caring about my age, or experience, or pedigree or credentials. All they wanted to know was what could I contribute to their sense of freedom, their elevated enthusiasm, the anticipation they held in their heart.

Even on this May spring morning when we ask God, metaphorically, to show us "The Way" to the fishing hole, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.