

Met along the way
Menno Mennonite Church
May 10, 2020

Purpose: To declare the revealing nature of Christ who comes to us in the ordinary.

Message: We are invited each day into the journey of being disciples.

Scripture: John 21:1-14

Synopsis: Of all the post-resurrection stories, this is one of my favorites. There is so much of the ordinary about it. The disciples go back to the work of their lives and plying the lakes and seas for a catch. They had met Jesus. They had received the Spirit. But they weren't quite sure what to do with it all so they did what came naturally—the went fishing. In this simple action of daily life Jesus comes and shows up with the basics of life—a simple breakfast of the basics of life. In this they are commissioned to the new and provided with what they need. We are invited to count on the work of Jesus coming to us each day as we look for what is new, what is next.

21 After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. ² Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. ³ Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴ Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." ⁶ He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. ⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. ⁸ But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

⁹ When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." ¹¹ So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

John 21:1-14 NRS

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There is something about the newness of a moment. It is this moment of keen excitement, with just a pinch of dread (or a cup, depending on the situation). Each time I have taken up something new, there was a two-fold feeling about it—grieving what had to be left behind, but always feeling the fizzle of the new at the same time. Each time I have moved there has been the familiar rhythm of anticipation and regret, reaching out for what was about to be, the friends who I was about to make, the life that was about to be, and the letting go of those I have had to leave behind, the places and things that rooted me before. I am glad that I have been able to be someone who has had many homes, even though I sometimes wonder what might have been if my roots were not quite so broadly and frequently planted. Its not bad; just one of those things that you wonder about from time to time.

Each time this has happened, I would always return to a familiar pattern of setting up a home, doing an exploration of the area and knowing what's what, and finding ways to establish my routine as quickly as possible as I moved into the unknown. The beginning is always a critical period of expectation and misgiving, and by in large we will do almost anything to shield ourselves from the perhaps truer feelings that are often just as common; I don't know what I am doing here—this is just not quite right. When we are in transition, when we are not sure what comes next, when we don't understand what our role is, we are vulnerable, at the moment when we least want anyone else to see it. Somehow the fact that this is a common ground for anyone facing the new escapes us and we hide the best we can. Most of the time we fall into what ever is familiar to cover the moment.

This is precisely where we find the disciples in the text of this morning. Somewhat at odd ends, having met the Lord, but not quite being sure what to do. I love this portion of John and its moment of raw humanity it contains. The disciples do what we all do when we are faced with the disconcerting and the discombobulating—they do what they know and what they can do. They go fishing to take their minds of their troubles. Never mind that they don't catch anything—they were doing something that they knew, that they could control. They had spent their time together, and they were trying to figure out what all this new stuff meant. Jesus was alive, yes; they believed, sure. But their reality, their lives were still in turmoil. They were like little kids who have just graduated to a new level; it was all new to them. They were still trying to find any sort of firm ground to set their feet, to grasp what was going on in their new worlds.

They returned to the trade that they had known from boys, the one thing they knew; they went fishing, and were probably trying to pretend that everything was exactly how it should be.

It is into this situation that Jesus comes to them. He comes to them in the midst of their confusion, in the midst of their uncertainty, in the midst of their misunderstanding. “You have no fish, do you children” he says. Envision the ensuing eye roll. A morning visitor on the beach with some tactical fishing advice; a strange man calls upon those who have just gone through the most gut wrenching, confusing, befuddling experience of their lives. We all know what it can be like when we find ourselves doing what is familiar, and still coming up empty.

Jesus comes to them with quiet words and a simple meal through unimpressive means, and their eyes are opened to a whole new world. Just after this, Jesus charges these fishers with their ultimate duties as fishers of all, and they are changed. Even when what they knew was failing, Jesus shows up, reveals himself, and changes everything. Jesus is alive, Jesus is present and meets them not with pronouncements of ‘peace be with you’, no I am the way the truth and the light, no great glowing lights and special effects of spectacle. Now that you have some fish, let’s have some breakfast. Come and eat, and know who I am. Come and sit, and rest in this holy moment. Sit down and see who I am in midst of your fear, in the midst of your grief, in the midst of your doubt. Come and eat, and be filled with the presence of God.

On many levels, we are in the season of newness. It might not be the revolutionary changes of old, but all the same, change is present with us. This is a function that has been with us long before we had ever even heard of COVID-19, but we know this change all the more now. It is in these moments of change, of startling newness that we are often confronted with the simplicity of the holy. It is in these states of transition and flux, where we have been forced out of our predetermined patterns and our expected way things are that we can be surprised with the newness of things; sometimes if we look carefully enough we can be surprised with the holiness of the moment, of Jesus meeting us where we least expect him to show up. It is when we are off balance, when we are trying to find our way that we are often embraced by someone reaching out in love, a new friend just formed, a student who’s trust you have just gained, that we can encounter the holy. It is in these times that we are also the quickest to keep moving and to cut ourselves off, where we most often seek to find the certainty of the we know best, of the familiar stable patterns that we know. We seek stability least we be discovered as we try to find our

groove, find our comfort zone. It is easy to miss the moments of revelation, the moments of holy love when we are busy trying to stabilize the way of our ship.

This might not seem to be time to step out, to be looking for the signs of God around us, to consider casting our nets on the other side. Yet it is in these times, as all times that God comes to us, and invites us to sustain ourselves in what God provides, in the simple grace of simple meetings of love, of simple blessings of bread and wine, of friendship and new possibilities. When we find ourselves without God, in simplicity comes and provides all that we need. God is calling into our occupied lives, offering blessings if we would hear, if we would listen, if we would be ready to receive that we are offered, in the form that we find it, in the way that we encounter it, even if it might be new, different, or take us in a way that we least expect.

My challenge for you this week is simple. No matter where you find yourself, no matter how you encounter a world in transition, or even if it is a week of the same old same old that have become so familiar as to be without thought and feeling, open yourself up. Expect to encounter the holy. Look for it. Reach for it. Embrace it. Open yourself to it. Prepare yourself to encounter the Lord, prepare yourself to be blessed, and I am confident that some way, some how, you will be blessed. You will be met if you anticipate being met along the way.

This is not how we typically think, this is not how we typically act, especially when we are moving from one place to another. We want our stability on our terms. Yet we know that God supplies. When you are looking for the in breaking of God, you will think of things differently. You will see things differently, you will find things take on a different shape than what they might otherwise. You might be surprised what finds you along the way. A kind word might be more than just nicety, it is the welcome of the Lord. An opportunity to show love is not simply another request in a demanding schedule, but a call to cast your net on the other side. Look for it; you might be surprised who you meet calling to you to come and be fed, and the encounters this might lead to.

May we in all stages of our life, all transitions of our circumstances, be open and ready to hear the invitation of Jesus to come, sit, eat, and receive the love of the living Christ. And may we be able to know the voice of Christ calling to us in love and in hope all situations and through all people.