

John 21:1-14

21 After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. ²Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. ³Simon 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. ⁴Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." ⁶He 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. ⁷That 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. ⁸But 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. ⁹When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. ¹⁰Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." ¹¹So 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. ¹²Jesus 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. ¹³Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ; grace, peace and mercy are yours through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

Watching bait fish swim around my Grandpa's homemade cement minnow tank down on the beach of the summer cabin was good fun for my sisters, cousins and me. We watched minnows for what seemed like hours dart and pool together and hide in the shadows to escape our attempts at capturing them in our well worn and oftentimes too short-handled nets. I can still smell the earthy fragrance of the moss covered boards we would stand on as we went on these adventures – dipping our nets into that tank of brackish water. The best part was watching my grandpa, my dad and my uncles come back from their fishing trips – heading in with their full stringers and taking their silver minnow buckets over to that tank where they would release the unused bait. I watched carefully as the freed minnows swam around and gained necessary oxygen as the old pump whirled quietly behind the cement walls. I couldn't wait to be a fisherman!

The time finally arrived. When I was six years old, my Grandpa invited me to spend the day with him on his boat fishing. It was what I was looking forward to and the invitation was accepted with excitement. But before we left he made sure I was ready for the day -- I had to put the minnows on the hook all by myself. I was appalled and a little bit afraid. And my grandpa asked, "Can you do it, kid?" Evidently I wanted to go in the boat and spend time with him more than I was concerned about slimy minnows and sharp hooks. So I said "yes". And off we went.

The first 30 minutes was exciting. I got to help gas the boat and I learned about my grandpa's favorite spot to catch walleyes – I took special attention to the way he spit over the side of the boat and talked to the gulls following us hoping to get a free meal from a stray minnow or two. Then we started fishing and I was tasked with baiting the hook. It went alright since I had all that experience with trying to catch those darned things. But what I found out was that after all the anticipation of getting out on the water – getting to the place where my Grandpa sensed all the fish were, getting organized within the boat and getting those squirming minnows on the hook...the next aspect of fishing was exceptionally boring. We had to wait long periods of time for bites and I found myself on rocks more than a few times - getting snags and making my grandpa circle around to free my line. A couple of times we even failed to land our catch.

There is a lot of preparation, waiting, and disappointment in fishing. And this is exactly where we enter our text this morning -- in a moment of frustration for these fishermen. They have been fishing all night to no avail. They are tired and disappointed. And they probably just want to go home.

Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, Zebedee's sons, and two other disciples were together fishing in the Sea of Galilee. They have returned to their previous vocation and head back to shore with empty nets after some time fishing. And there stands Jesus. His call to them is to go back out and try again and he gives them instructions as to the next step. He tells them to put the nets out on the right side of the boat. And they follow his instructions.

The amazing thing to me is that the disciples did not know who Jesus was at first - but they went back out. Was it their desperation for a catch, a pure love of fishing as vocation, a desire for success, a sense of the specialness of the man calling them to return to their nets, or something else? Whatever it was, they ventured back out and found huge success. Their nets were overflowing. They catch 153 fish. Why that number? Well, many have guessed -- but the number for most simply implies that many, many were caught. 153 fish? That is a crazy amount -- and why? Because that is how much God loves us. Perhaps it is as simple as this - moments of abundance reveal God's love.

The whole gospel of John is about abundant grace. What good is the incarnation if you can't touch, taste, smell, see, and hear it? So 153 fish is that very truth. This gospel story points to what grace upon grace can be -- a boatload of fish, when you least expect it, just like the wine at Cana...when all hope is gone, when you wonder what you are doing, when you think there is no future, when your well has dried up, when you doubt that grace is true, when you question if grace is for you. You see, by a ridiculous amount of fish, we come to know that God's grace cannot be limited.

This is the resurrection story we desperately need. All of us. Grace means that Jesus will always show up on the shore and will invite us to share a meal once again, because abundance really means abundance when it comes to God. Because, you see, God truly *does* love the world.

So the disciples have breakfast with the man they now recognize as Jesus. It's as if they celebrate the Eucharistic - despite the lack of wine. They are re-membered back into relationship with the One whom they had denied and deserted and ran away from. And it is at this meal that they receive a re-commissioning from the Lord. They are reminded who they are and what they were originally called to be. They are challenged to get back in the boat and try again -- in more ways than one.

So you see, this is not only a story of God's grace...this is the kind of story that allows for some creative discussions of what church and ministry might look like if we dropped our nets on the other side and if we really followed Jesus.

We have heard and learned here at this synod assembly a lot about accompaniment. How accompaniment happens where "my story" and "your story" meet "God's story" in an intersection of relationships where we walk together in God, through the Spirit, and by Christ's example. Just as Jesus accompanies the disciples in the midst of their exhaustion and confusion, revealing himself, making sense of his death on the cross and the biblical prophecies about him, and making himself known among them through a meal on the beach - So too are we called to be like Christ in a humble journey together as companions along Christ's path - and we can trust that God is present among us in both our joys and sorrows, in our deep gratitude and in all our doubts.

The good news is that Christ is God in the flesh, walking among humanity in deep and humbled love, seeking to reconcile creation back to God in a cosmic embrace of salvation. We are called not only to tell this story but to live it and walk it together among neighbor and stranger, embodying Christ's love as the story continues to unfold through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And the hope is that as we walk God's story together as companions, our hearts burn within us in more fully recognizing Christ's presence among us in every step of the journey.

So if this is a re-commissioning story, how can we strive to accompany one another and tell our shared stories within God's story? Through prayer and mindful conversation, through companion synod relationships and mission trips, through advocacy for justice and in social outreach in our communities, through teamwork and sharing resources, through outdoor ministry retreats and Bible studies - and we can be aware of how this storytelling already takes place during worship through the liturgy, the "work of the people" All of this is always taking place in community, because through Christ our stories are not lived out alone on an isolated, meaningless journey: our walks converge day by day in God's never-ending story of grace, told through the reality of the cross in our lives.

We can use the lenses of accompaniment and storytelling to recognize our interconnectivity between humanity and with the divine and to encourage each other to engage in conversation in relationships of mutuality. In biblical and Christian history, in congregations, across synods and church bodies, we can identify ways in which we walk together, engaging in honest conversation about our anguish and celebrating Christ's presence among us as we continue to do God's will in this world.

We are called to work to eradicate poverty, to be prophetic against injustice, to be bridge builders between South and North and East and West, to strengthen our sisters and brothers who suffer or find discrimination because of their faith, and to be responsible for the integrity of creation. Accompaniment pertains not only to those who have the same mind and share the same confession, but also to those who may be different in theology or culture, so that we may come to the realization that we are called to serve together a broken and wounded world. This theology of accompaniment asks us to walk alongside one another with humility, carrying the cross and denying ourselves, bearing one another's burdens and celebrating together - finding Christ in the other, whose diversity we joyfully accept for the sake of the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world.

Siblings in Christ - we do not merely sit in reflection or stay hunkered down within our boats – worried about our meager catches, distracted by our exhaustion and all the other things that consume us. We are called to hear the words of the risen Christ as we are re-commissioned to go forth - continuing the journey and continuing to discover how Jesus remains with us on the journey. We bodily encounter Jesus in bread and wine and water, more clearly understanding God's story of the Gospel through Christ opening our eyes and minds and hearts, and we trust that we have been clothed with power from on high. We continue to walk the story-journey, aware that Christ remains with us so that in our words and actions, our lives can tell God's story of grace, mercy and love which is to be proclaimed in our Lord's name to all nations.

How does walking with, dwelling with, conversing with, and breaking bread with accomplish such things? Simply put, this peace and wholeness is made perfect by the grace of God who first accompanied us in the creation of the universe, in making us God's people and God's children, and in the incarnational event of Christ's life, death, resurrection, and coming again.

This is our story of life together with God and with one another, and we are simply called to the fullness and boldness of living it out every day together through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In compassion, trust, humility, hope, and faith we walk this story together, with Christ ever our companion. Thanks be to God! Amen