

**Date: Sunday April 18, 2010**

**Scripture: John 21: 1-19**

**Title: “So Ordinary”**

**The Message of Scripture (Sermon Thesis): Jesus meets his friends beside the lake as they finishing fishing. What an ordinary experience.**

**The Sharing of the Good News (The Sermon Purpose): God wants to be with us wherever we are – even and especially in the ordinariness of our lives - and that’s good news.**

**(Remember, it’s all about God!)**

An older gentleman fished at the lake daily and always came in with his limit of fish. The local game warden became suspicious and asked another game warden to come in “under cover”. The undercover warden gained the man’s confidence and was invited to go fishing with him. Here’s what the warden discovered. Upon stopping the boat in the middle of the lake, the man proceeded to open his tackle box, take out a hand grenade, pull the pin, and toss it overboard. The grenade exploded, fish began to float to the surface, and the man started picking them up. The game warden pulled out his badge, revealed his identity, and informed the man he was under arrest. The man then took out another grenade, pulled the pin, tossed it to the warden and said, “Now, are you going to talk or fish?” (fishingjokes)

I share that story today because in our gospel reading we have a fishing story. Gathered together for this occasion were Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, brothers James and John, and two other disciples who weren’t named, but a total of seven of Jesus’ faithful followers are altogether. They were no longer in Jerusalem. They’re near

the beautiful fresh water lake known as Tiberius, sometimes called Galilee, about a two-day walk north of Jerusalem. Perhaps the disciples needed to get away from all the stress of the previous months. Maybe they wanted to do something relaxing while they tried to make sense of all that had happened. Peter, their leader, said, “I’m going fishing.” You can imagine the response of the other six, eager to go back to something they could comprehend and control like boats, nets, and fish instead of crowds, chaos, and a crucifixion. “Hey, we’re with you, Peter!” they shouted back. But as in many fishing adventures, the initial enthusiasm of the determined fishermen waned as they cast their nets over and over with nothing to show for their efforts. This fishing event that sounded like such a good idea led only to weariness and disappointment.

Then Jesus appeared to them on the beach close enough to call out to them. But they didn’t know it was Jesus. “Any luck?” he asked. This is still the common jargon of fishing people today. “Nothing,” they grumbled back to him. “Try the other side of the boat,” he said. Now imagine yourself in that boat. You’ve been on the water for hours. You’re tired and hungry. Your back and shoulders are stiff and sore from throwing out the net. You’ve caught nothing, and now some guy on the beach knows just what to do. Yeah, right! Still, they did what he said. And they weren’t able to pull the net in because it was so full of fish! Peter knew instantly. It’s Jesus! Ever the impulsive one, Peter jumped into the water to swim toward shore, moving toward Jesus. The others came to shore in the boat pulling the fish-laden net behind, and Jesus was reunited with seven friends (Lundborg).

The rest of the story, however, includes no description of the men's great joy in their reunion. Instead, it's an understated story of a huge quantity of fish, one hundred fifty three of them, and an invitation to breakfast, a breakfast of fish and bread. Jesus acts as the host taking the food and giving it to his friends. There's an undercurrent of hushed silence as John narrates the story saying, "None of the disciples dared to ask him, 'Who are you?' because they knew it was the Lord" (Jn 21:12b).

Paul Lundborg writes that this is a story containing equal amounts of mystery and simplicity, enough of each to catch our attention. There is mystery in the presence of the risen Christ appearing to his friends from the shore unrecognized. The mystery deepens when his suggestion to put their nets on the other side of the boat results in an enormous success. And the mystery is honored when his friends realize it is their Lord in their midst, but they remain silent, evidently so stunned by his presence that they dare speak. His holy presence evokes a reverence expressing itself in muted voices. Their awe is subdued, perhaps weary, but still worshipful.

The mystery is palpable, but the story is told simply. It's a meeting with their crucified Lord, the risen Christ, but he appears as another fisherman, offering good advice resulting in a fine catch, and they recognize him as they share a breakfast meal on the beach. It seems natural that there might be more drama in this meeting. Here is the ultimate divine-human encounter. The crucified Messiah had been placed in a tomb. Some have seen the empty tomb. He has appeared to the disciples before calming their fears, but they have not seen him since, so they

are unsettled. Shouldn't this reunion be more glorious? The dialogue is meager: "Let's go fishing...any luck...try the other side...bring me some fish...let's have breakfast." As we move on in the Gospel of John, the text includes the more drama-filled meeting of Jesus and Peter when Jesus breaks Peter's heart with his question, asked three times, "Do you love me?" But we won't go there today. We will stay focused on the risen Lord Jesus Christ revealing himself to his friends in the commonality of everyday life (Lundborg).

Bob loves to go mountain climbing and hiking. He spends as much time as he can in the Rocky Mountains. To him, there is no other place that he can feel the presence of God. When he stands upon those rugged cliffs, with blue sky overhead that he can almost touch, a view out into surrounding states that lifts his spirit, and the warmth of the sun on his back reminding him he is not alone, he knows that God is real.

But the day always comes when he literally comes down from his mountain top experience. He returns to his home in Ohio where he works as an accountant at a large care facility. In these days that take up most of his life, he feels so out of touch. There are no mountains to climb, no natural high to relish, and no sense of the divine presence to appreciate.

Bob has talked to people about this sense of loss he experiences. His co-workers try to point out that he is surrounded by acts of caring and compassion that can be representative of God's love. His friends make a point to remind him that he lives in a fertile farming state and that the acts of planting, growth, and harvest can

be signs of God's power at work. Family members invite him to attend church, to be part of a faith community, and to see how God can be found in daily lives. But Bob wants none of it. He is convinced that God can only be experienced in the grandiose. Someday he plans to move to Colorado. Until then, he has resigned himself to muddling through the meaningless days of his life.

Well, Bob may have many issues to work on, but today's gospel story is the perfect antidote for Bob and others who seek signs of God only in that which is spiritual, dramatic, or glorious. So much of the surprise revealed in Jesus is how God comes to us in that which is ordinary. Think about it. Jesus came to earth not in the form of royalty, but as a baby. He rode into Jerusalem not on a horse, but on a donkey. He died not a glorious death, but on a cross with two criminals beside him. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, as church, we celebrate Jesus' presence in baptismal water and in the bread and juice or wine of communion. These are two simple acts - water and a meal - very ordinary. In addition, Jesus told us to become like a child in matters of faith. He is present where two or three are gathered. We are judged on the basis of how we treat "the least of these." He spoke in the daily jargon of farmers and fishing people, not in the refined vocabulary of scholars.

So where do we look for God's presence? I suggest we look in our work, our neighborhood, our family, and our friends, perhaps even those we don't consider to be friends. Any sort of relationship will do, even our relationship with our self. We can look at this very faith community, which has become more complete today with Tabitha and Eric joining with us, as we seek to serve in Jesus name. And we

can look at the natural things of the earth; budding trees and growing grass. We can look in the very routine of our lives. Today is a good reminder not to be so Godly focused that we overlook God in our very midst.

You see, Jesus revealed God's presence through simple acts in oh so ordinary places; a net full of fish, a breakfast on the beach, and camaraderie with friends. That's good news and we shouldn't be surprised by it for it is God's desire to be with us wherever we are – more the ordinary than the extraordinary. And right now, this is a very ordinary moment kind of like a quiet moment of fishing. So our question becomes, should we talk or pray? Please join me in a very ordinary prayer.

Dear Lord,

You are with us. No glory, glamour, or glitz; Just this very ordinary gathering for worship within this day that you have made and we sense you in our midst. What a gift! As creator of the entire universe and beyond, you know all of us right here and right now. We are blessed. We share our appreciation and prepare to go into the world to show it. This we pray in Jesus name, Amen.

Offering: As we go through this regular time of worship, let us be mindful of what and how we give. The ushers will please . . .

Dedication: Lord, we ask that you accept and bless our offering and guide us as we use it in the days ahead to share your good news. This we pray, Amen.

Benediction: So we go forth to share the blessing of God that we have received here and to do so in our ordinary days and nights that are ahead. Go forth, Amen and Amen.

Sources:

Fishingjokes; [www.fishingjokes.us](http://www.fishingjokes.us); 2010.

Holy Bible – New Revised Standard Version; Harper Bibles: San Francisco; 2007.

Lundborg, Paul; “The Minister’s Annual Manuel”; Logos Productions: Inver Grove Heights, MN; 2009.