

May 5, 2019
3rd Sunday of Easter
John 21:1-19

After this, Jesus revealed himself again to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. He revealed himself in this way. Together were Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, Zebedee's sons, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We also will come with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. When it was already dawn, Jesus was standing on the shore; but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, have you caught anything to eat?" They answered him, "No." So he said to them, "Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something." So they cast it, and were not able to pull it in because of the number of fish. So the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he tucked in his garment, for he was lightly clad, and jumped into the sea. The other disciples came in the boat, for they were not far from shore, only about a hundred yards, dragging the net with the fish.

When they climbed out on shore, they saw a charcoal fire with fish on it and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you just caught." So Simon Peter went over and dragged the net ashore full of one hundred fifty-three large fish. Even though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come, have breakfast." And none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they realized it was the Lord. Jesus came over and took the bread and gave it to them, and in like manner the fish. This was now the third time Jesus was revealed to his disciples after being raised from the dead.

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 then 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 distressed that he had said to him a 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.

Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." He said this signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when he had said this, he said to him, "Follow me."

Background:

Many Scripture scholars believe that this text was not part of the original gospel but was added later by John's disciples. The text itself draws on some themes that are familiar in the rest of John's gospel. Jesus invites the disciples to a meal of bread and fish. The members of John's community would recall the account of Jesus feeding the crowd with the five loaves of bread and two fish (John 6:3-15). They would also be familiar with Jesus' description of himself as the good shepherd (John 10:1-18). The third important element may not be as apparent as the other two: the role of the disciples in Jesus' ministry—especially the roles of the beloved disciple and Peter.

The disciples are portrayed in the gospels as arguing among themselves about who was the most important. For example, the brothers, James and John, seek assurance from Jesus that they will hold the two most prestigious positions when Jesus comes into power. Even at the Last Supper they are caught arguing among themselves about who is the most important. This prompts Jesus to wash their feet as a model for how they are to seek greatness.

The Mediterranean culture has a much different system of loyalty than that found in westerners' cultures. For the disciples and people of their culture, their loyalty was strongly tied to the leader, but not to one another. From this perspective, the arguments between them, even at the Last Supper, begin to make sense. That atmosphere would have persisted after Jesus' death until they could work out among themselves in whom they would place their loyalties.

There is some evidence of that struggle being worked out in the text here. In John's description of the Good Shepherd, he says that the gatekeeper lets in the one who he identifies as the good shepherd. The good shepherd is further described as the one who goes ahead of, and leads, the sheep. Recall the arrest of Jesus and his being taken to the house of the high

priest. The beloved disciple is described in terms that parallel the role of the good shepherd. Both Peter and the beloved disciple follow Jesus, but it is the beloved disciple who is permitted to enter the inner courtyard. He speaks to the gatekeeper, who when allows Peter to enter. The beloved disciple is described as the one who follows Jesus through the gate. It is he who is recognized by the gatekeeper and is permitted to enter. Lastly it is he who leads, who goes before Peter and leads him into the courtyard. (John 18:15-27) John's description of Jesus' celebration of the Passover meal with his disciples also places John in the most significant role. It is John, the beloved, who sits next to Jesus. Jesus indicates the identity of the betrayer to him. Peter then asks the beloved disciple about whom Jesus was speaking. (John 13:21-30) Both of these texts suggest that John was casting the beloved disciple in a more favored light than Peter.

However, in the gospel text for this Sunday, their roles change drastically. Here, it is Peter who is clearly the leader and the person who takes the initiative. He declares that he is going fishing, and the other disciples, Thomas, Nathanael, James, John, and two other unnamed disciples all follow. When the disciples encounter Jesus after a long night of fishing, it is John who first recognizes that it is Jesus on the shore, but it is Peter who jumps into the water to join Jesus. After the disciples eat the breakfast that Jesus prepared for them, it is Peter that Jesus turns to with the question, "Do you love me?" In this dialogue, Jesus gives Peter the role of caring for his flock. Peter has become the Good Shepherd. We can only wonder what took place in the early Christian community that led to Peter taking on this role. That this text is being proclaimed as a Gospel for this important feast testifies that God continues to work in the church and in communities, even in times of difficult struggles.

Reflection Questions:

1. When disagreements arise around me, I usually...
2. When I am aware that I disagree with friends about matters of faith, I ...
3. When the gospel speaks of Peter and some of the other disciples going fishing, I took that as...
4. What do you think Jesus is saying by calling them "children" when he asks if they have caught anything?
5. The thought of asking another if they loved me...
5. When Jesus asks Peter if he loves him, I...
7. Jesus' response to Peter's profession of love is always in terms of caring for his sheep. What does that mean for you?
8. When you hear Jesus tell Peter of his future fate...
9. Can you talk with God or Jesus honestly about how you would respond to Jesus' questions to Peter, or about your own desire to shepherd those in your care, or about anything that arose within you from this gospel?

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Excerpts from the readings for May 5, 2019, the Third Sunday of Easter

The apostles were brought in before the Sanhedrin. The high priest questioned them, "We gave you strict orders to stop teaching in that name. Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and want to bring this man's blood upon us." But Peter and the apostles said, "We must obey God rather than men. The God of our ancestors raised Jesus, though you had him killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as savior to grant Israel repentance and forgiveness of sins. We are witnesses of these things." The Sanhedrin ordered the apostles to stop speaking in the name of Jesus, and dismissed them. They left, rejoicing that they had been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name.

*I will praise you, Lord, for you drew me clear and did not let my enemies rejoice over me.
You brought me up from the netherworld; you preserved me from among those going down into the pit.
Sing praise to the Lord, you his faithful ones, and give thanks to his holy name.
For his anger lasts but a moment; a lifetime, his good will. At nightfall, weeping enters in,
but with the dawn, rejoicing. Hear, O Lord, and have pity on me; O Lord, be my helper.
You changed my mourning into dancing; O Lord, my God, forever will I give you thanks.*

I looked and heard the voices of angels who surrounded the throne and the creatures and the elders. They were countless in number, and they cried out in a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, wisdom and strength, honor and glory and blessing." Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, everything in the universe, cry out: "To the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor, glory and might, forever and ever." The four living creatures answered, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.

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Excerpts from Acts 5:27-32, 40-41; Psalm 30:2, 4-6, 11-13; Revelation 5:11-14; and John 21:1-19