



Broad Street Presbyterian Church

760 East Broad Street • Columbus Ohio 43205 • (614) 221-6552 • fax (614) 221-5722 • www.bspsc.org

“The Day After the Day After”

John 21:1-13
April 23, 2017

Reverend Amy Miracle
Broad Street Presbyterian Church
Columbus, OH

What do you do the day after Easter? The day after Easter, I reflect on the previous day. I remember the beautiful music, give thanks to God for the children of the church who added so much, celebrate the good attendance, rejoice in the fact that the rain held off so we could have the Easter egg hunt outside. The day after Easter, I don't do much. It's a day off for the church staff.

But the day after the day after Easter is a different story. It's not my favorite day. Because the closer it gets to Easter the more likely I am to use the excuse beloved of church staffs: “That can wait until after Easter.” “Let's look at that after Easter.” The day after the day after Easter, we have to start doing all of the things we put off for the last month. Let me give you an example. Tomorrow morning I have a meeting where we will work through a revision of the personnel handbook. Important? Yes. Interesting? Not really. The day after the day after Easter is a time to go back to work.

So, what did the disciples do the day after the day after that first Easter? They go back to work. They go back to being who they were before Easter. Peter says, “I will go fishing.” That's what he did before he met Jesus. He is by vocation and experience and inclination a fisherman. And after the trauma and drama of crucifixion and resurrection, I'm thinking that Peter and the others find comfort and reassurance in the familiar. Routines are comforting at such times. So, they go back to fishing.¹ They fish into the night.

Jesus, newly risen from the dead, appears at daybreak and the disciples (the Gospel of John is clear about this) do not recognize him. From the shore, he asks them,

Have you any fish?

An innocent question – a logical question to ask of fishermen. It's a variation of the question I ask of other people when I am fishing. I ask, “You catch anything?” If the answer is “yes,” then I have follow-up questions. “Where did you catch them?” “What bait were you using?” “How deep were they?”

Jesus only asks one question.

Have you any fish?

It's an innocent question, right? But I would maintain that in the Gospel of John, Jesus never asks an innocent question. No, this is a loaded question – a significant question – a wonderful question.

Have you any fish?

¹ Peter Gomes, *Sermons: Biblical Wisdom for Daily Living*, p. 80.

How are you doing? Are you doing well? How are you getting on in your work? Are you happy in your job? Are you satisfied in your vocation? Are you successful in your labor? What do you have to show for the time you spend?²

Have you any fish?

It is a question asked of the disciples – it is a question asked of us by the one who looks at us from afar and who sees more of us than we can see of ourselves.

Are you getting satisfaction out of what you do best? What do you have to show for all your efforts?

Have you any fish?

So, how do you answer that question? Maybe you answer yes, I have fish and they are good fish and I don't need any more fish or different fish or better fish. I'm getting along just fine. I work hard and I feel good about my work and I'm getting along in the world and I'm satisfied with the salary I make and the things that I can buy and, yes, all of that makes me happy. If that is your answer, well, all power to you.

But if your answer is some form of no – well, I work hard and I think I'm getting somewhere but something is missing – something is out of balance. I need more – I want more – I long for more – but I don't know exactly what "more" is, but I know it has nothing to do with promotions and possessions. Or maybe you have retired from fishing or you would like to fish but you can't find a job fishing.

Or maybe there is a hunger within you that cannot be met by bigger and better fish. Sometimes, no matter how hard we try and how much we know, we still come up empty. Hollow. Hungry.

Have you any fish?

If your answer is some form of "no," then you have something in common with the disciples.

The whole thing is more straightforward in the first century. When asked, "have you any fish?" the disciples have only to look in their nets to see they have no fish and so they answer with a simple, "No." And Jesus says, "Huh, too bad," and he keeps walking down the beach.

No, of course, that's not what happens. Jesus says, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." Try the other side.

They do so and their net is full – full of 153 fish. Now that number may have some obscure symbolic meaning but I'll tell you what it means to me – a lot of fish. We're talking abundance, excess, plenty, more than enough.

The disciples try fishing on their own and they get nothing. The risen Christ shows up and there is abundance, plenty, more than enough. Interesting.

When Peter finds out that the stranger on the beach is none other than the Lord, he gets very excited. In fact, he goes a little overboard in his excitement. But let me read the text because it qualifies as one of the more bizarre episodes in scripture. "When Simon Peter hears that it is the Lord, he puts on some clothes, for he is naked, and

² IBID, p. 82.

jumps into the sea.” The implication of this sentence is that Peter fishes naked. (Frankly, that is information that I wish the Gospel writer had kept to himself.)

Why does Peter jump into the water? My best guess is that he looks at those 153 fish and realizes for the first time that this resurrection thing isn’t just about resuscitating a dead Jesus – no, it is about more life, new life, abundant life for everyone. And this new life that Jesus has talked about isn’t some pie in the sky, maybe some day, when we cross the Jordan, when we meet our maker – but here, now, today.

And I wonder if it was at that moment that Peter forgives himself for all the ways in which he has hurt Jesus and let him down. As he abandons ship, as he gets free of the boat, Peter lays down his burden of guilt and begins life anew. He embraces the forgiveness offered to him by the resurrected one and steps into a new life.

Maybe, Peter is just so glad that he is alive and that Jesus is alive and that God gives us second chances and third chances and fourth chances and that each day is a new day to live in God’s world and maybe all those thoughts rushed into his brain and he flung his arms into the air, and with a wide, goofy grin on his face, he jumps into the water.

As Peter sits on the beach in his wet clothes eating his fish... it is the beginning of a new life. Peter who denied and lied goes on to become Jesus’ preacher, his martyr, his prophet. It doesn’t happen by magic – it is a slow process of transformation – getting up each day and trying to live a life shaped by the risen Christ. And it all begins that day on the water.

Life on the other side of Easter – does it still sound fuzzy, spiritual, vague? If so, that is the fault of this preacher. Jesus is not fuzzy. He is very specific. Life on the other side of Easter is all about food and drink, labor and love. It’s as real and as tangible as 153 fish. It’s as real and as tangible as the meal that will be dropped off later today to one of our members who had surgery last week. It’s as real and as tangible as the mulch I had delivered yesterday. It’s as real and tangible as the food that will be given out tomorrow at the Food Pantry. It’s as real and tangible as lowering my deductible through forgiveness. OK, I better explain that one. Yes, I said lowering my deductible through forgiveness. My health insurance provider does something called *Call to Health*. It encourages healthy choices. If you do certain things – get an annual exam, exercise three times a week, lose weight, walk regularly – you qualify for a reduced deductible. There’s a new option: practice forgiveness. The *Call to Health* website says:

Research shows that forgiveness is good for our health, relationships, and communities. Follow the process in this challenge three times by 11/10/ 2017 to forgive someone who hurt you.

I love that an insurance provider recognizes the health benefits of forgiveness. Peter is familiar with the benefits of forgiveness except, in his case, the person he most needs to forgive is himself. For him, living on this side of Easter is all about moving past blame and regret.

Living on this side of Easter is all about the large and small decisions we make every day – where we live and how we live – how we make and spend our money – who and how we love. Living on this side of Easter is all about a set of practices, a collection of habits, a way of living in the world. It’s about establishing routines of gratitude and generosity and forgiveness.

We have a choice. We can shape a life on our own – we can work and work at making a living and, at the end of day, have no fish. Or, on the other hand, we can make a life with God and receive abundance – more than enough life – more than enough love – more than enough fish.

If you want to know what that life is like, cast your nets on the other side and respond to the invitation that Jesus extends to you. Cast your nets on the other side and let him fill them with such an abundance of joy and hope and forgiveness that your lives cannot begin to contain it. When Peter catches a glimpse of life on this side of Easter, he gets so excited he jumps newly clothed into the sea. As he hurls himself in the air, before he hits the water, he is saying something. Can you hear him? He is saying:

Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed. Amen.