Abundant Grace
A Sermon for Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC, Lexington
Rev. Reebee Kavich Girash
May 17, 2020

Text:

John 21:9-19

Our gospel includes one of Jesus’ resurrection appearances to the disciples. It finishes with a dialogue with Peter in which Jesus calls him into a new form of discipleship.

John 21:9-19

9 When 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 and 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.
15 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.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my lambs.’ 16A second time he said to him, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Tend my sheep.’ 17He said to him the third time, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ Peter felt hurt because he said to him the 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. 18Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.’ 19(He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, ‘Follow me.’

Prayer

Sermon

I had the honor of preaching at an installation over Zoom yesterday- which got me to thinking there’s a lot more we can do over Zoom these days than I would have imagined. I chose to preach today on the same text as the installed pastor had chosen for me, because I think Peter’s call to feed Jesus’ sheep is our common calling right now.

Peter goes back to his boat when the world changes.

I’ve preached this to you before: In the midst of trauma, the risen Jesus came to the disciples and offered peace.

Peter eventually had to go back to work - perhaps he was an essential worker providing fish to hungry folks or perhaps his unemployment application had not yet gone through, or perhaps dear Peter just gravitated to the familiar and got back in the fishing boat that had fed him and his family for so many years before, ready to throw the net into the water and ponder what his changed world would be like. And then he encountered the risen Jesus in full nets of fish and breakfast on the beach and a call to feed Jesus’ sheep, to tend Jesus’ flock.

These days I see every Biblical text as a metaphor for pandemic. If you are not in this space I pray your forgiveness and tolerance.

We are all emerging into a changed world right now, having battened down the hatches and closed the shutters, we are now sliding open the windows and peeking outside. The floodwaters have not yet receded but here is something that is true: eight weeks ago most of us thought the storm would pass over in a few weeks but the flood looks to disrupt us for another year or two. The flood we are going through is not just a crisis of infectious disease but an economic storm, too, and an economic flood that turns quickly into a food desert.

We open the window and peek outside,
and we see a new world,
A need to rebuild,
A call to build a just and compassionate new economy,
A call to address systemic injustice and racism,
A call to a sustainable economy that stewards the earth, God’s beautiful creation.
A call to feed our neighbors.

Many of us have focused inward while staying at home - even as God has started to call us to find new ways to serve our neighbors.

So we turn to our sacred stories, our stories of abundance and grace in times of change, trauma, and transformation. These are stories of abundance, even so.

Peter swam to shore and ate breakfast with Jesus and was called to a new ministry, feeding and tending and shepherding. Grace abounds.

Right now, the risen Christ’s call to Peter should not be dismissed as metaphor. People are hungry. Food pantries in our area have seen a 100% increase in need, even as they have had greater difficulties getting healthy food. These numbers will grow.

Tangible human needs will continue to grow.

And, even so, there is enough for all. There is still enough for all.

So, I think, there’s more to learn from Peter. Now, Peter, I think, liked to go big. He was a flashy kind of a guy. He couldn’t just have his feet washed, but also his head and hands. He needed to walk on water, he wanted to build a dwelling up on the top of the mountain, and Peter had big things to say. The risen Jesus, after a breakfast of bread and grilled fish, asked Peter to focus and simplify. If you love me, just feed them. A simple call, not small but clear. Jesus gave to the rock of his church a sense of purpose.

And right about now, if we are looking for a common sense of purpose and calling, Peter’s call sounds pretty on the mark. Do you love me? Feed my sheep.

I want to tell you some stories of Pilgrims feeding sheep, Pilgrims helping, Pilgrims stepping up to meet human needs right now.

The Eastertide message today is one of grace and abundance, a call to feed people and give thanks together. Resurrection is abundance. As we look to the future on this good earth, we bring an Easter perspective: God turns scarcity into abundance, despair into hopefulness. When we feed people, we partner with God in that great miracle. Grace abounds.

As you simply feed people, give rides, retire medical debt, provide baby gear and socks -

may that be miraculous.

Amen.