

Preacher: Rev. Karen E. Gale
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13:01

Fishing...Take Two
John 21:1-14

The Pope arrives in heaven, where St. Peter awaits him. St. Peter asks who he is. The Pope says, "I am the pope."

St. Peter asks, "Who? There's no such name in my book." The Pope replies, "I'm the representative of God on Earth." Puzzled, St. Peter asked, "Does God have a representative? He didn't tell me..."

The Pope replies, "But I am the leader of the Catholic Church..." and St. Peter again looking puzzled says, "The Catholic church ...Never heard of it... Wait, I'll check with the boss."

St. Peter walks away through Heaven's Gate and says to God, "There's a some guy standing outside who claims he's your representative on earth."

God says, "I don't have a representative on earth, not that I know of...Wait, I'll ask Jesus." God yells for Jesus who comes over and asks what is up. God and St. Peter explain the situation and Jesus says, "Wait, I'll go outside and have a little chat with that fellow."

Ten minutes pass and Jesus re-enters the room laughing out loud. St. Peter asks Jesus why he's laughing. Jesus answers, "Remember that fishing club I started 2000 years ago? It still exists!"....

Yes, that little fishing club still exists. Here you all are....

This morning's scripture is actually the beginning of that fishing club. Or rather, not the beginning, but the beginning of the next phase of the fishing club. It has gone from a club following a leader, doing it one way, and now is called to go fishing in a different way, a way that is a little less clear, a little more scary in some ways, a way that requires the disciples to make up their own rules and ways of going ahead.

And it is wildly successful. At least I think so. Look around. It's been 2000 years. It's still here. Here you are.

Last week I asked whether Jesus' death and resurrection were a success story. A terrible death. Frightened disciples. A strange miracle.

And this week it doesn't look much better.
Despite having seen Jesus twice before...
Despite hearing he had been raised from the dead..
What are the disciples doing?

Fishing. Why? Because that's what they did before Jesus. And now that he's gone, what else is there to do? (When things get hard we often go back to what we know, what is familiar, even if it isn't what best serves us.)

What Jesus calls the disciples to do in today's scripture is to do things differently, to fish from the other side of the boat.

As the parent of a special needs child, I have learned many times over that I often have to fish from the other side of the boat when parenting my specific, wonderful, and wonderfully different child. The parenting books and parenting blogs....well, let's just say haven't always been too helpful with my situation. Doing the same thing didn't work. I fish from the other side of the boat.

Jesus tells the disciples to fish from the other side of the boat and then they pull in a huge catch, 153 fish in all.

This may be one of the most helpful things Jesus ever said for leading churches. Keep in mind there was no church yet. This was just a fishing club, remember.

But fishing from the other side of the boat is key, especially as the church navigates cultural changes and religious changes. The church will never look again like it did in the 1950s with the pews bursting. The church will never again be THE religion of the land. There no longer will be blue laws on Sundays that close stores and bar soccer games. That is not reality. So, we can keep fishing with that mindset. Or we can fish from the other side of the boat.

Figuring out what that means is harder. Where is the other side of the boat for Pilgrim Church? The work done while creating the profile can help us:

- We learned there are very isolated seniors who are desperately house poor.
- We learned that mental health concerns are in the forefront of discussions at the school system as pressure to be a student one particular way puts kids at risk.
- We learned how diversity in race, religion/non-religion, ethnic background has challenged the way long time Lexington residents see and understand the town and its changing demographics.

Which side or sides of the boat shall Pilgrim fish on?

As some of you know, I teach literacy to students working on getting their GED. Recently we had a site visit from the folks who oversee programs in Massachusetts. The visitor sat down and asked the teachers, "so, your students are dropouts, right?"

Drop-outs. We sat in stunned silence. Yes, at one point students in our program may have been called drop-outs, but that is not the reality of this time and place. Talk about an old way of fishing.

We fish a lot differently these days to catch our folks. We partner with the local prison to help folks coming out on parole who need to get their diploma. They are the students we serve. Our students are teenagers so badly bullied in school that they could not continue in the school system. We provide a place for students to learn who are coming out of domestic violence situations or who are emancipated at 16. We fish on the other side of the boat, well, many sides of the boat, really. We've learned a different way of fishing.

So what about here and now at Pilgrim? The Interim Time is all about asking questions, looking in the mirror to see where you are, and thinking ahead about how you might move forward with a settled pastor.

There is not a right way to fish. We are called to fish faithfully and sometimes that might mean some long nights of catching nothing. But if we listen to the new ways Jesus calls us forth, we can risk learning to be church and offer hope and hospitality in new ways. Fishing from the other side of the boat. A new day for an old fishing club. Thanks be to God.

Amen.