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John 21:1-14

Resurrection Stories

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John 21:1-14 NRSV

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will go with you.” They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” They answered him, “No.” He said to them, “Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off. When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.”  So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus 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. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

 Have you ever thought about how your entire life can change in an instant? When I was a junior in high school my stepfather was in a car accident. He had surgery that night to relieve the pressure on his brain but he never regained consciousness and after one week he was brain dead. For three weeks my family tried to have the wishes of his Living Will carried out and turn off the machines. For a month our lives were turned upside down and when we were finally able to celebrate his life at his funeral service, I just wanted life to get back to normal. I wanted life to be the way that it always had been. I didn’t want life to be forever different. I remember the day of his funeral, I actually went to drill team practice. It was what I knew, and it gave me great comfort for a little while to pretend that my life was not forever changed.

 It seems like we do that in life. When there is great tragedy, we give people time to mourn, we send cards to show our sympathy, we send casseroles, we pray for them, and then after a while we expect people to move on, to get over it, to pull themselves together.

 After Easter, the disciples try to get back to life as they knew it. They are trying to move on. And they move on after Jesus’ death and resurrection by doing what they have always known. Jesus is alive, but they are not sure what that means. They are not sure how to move forward, so they go back to what they used to do. They had been fishermen all of their lives, after all. When Simon Peter says he is going fishing, he is saying that he is going back to work, going back to Galilee, going back to doing what he and all of the disciples were doing before they had met Jesus. Simon Peter is the one who denied Jesus three times, so he also might be going back to fishing to hide from Jesus.[[1]](#footnote-1) But the other disciples go with Simon Peter because they had no more sense of direction or purpose than he did.[[2]](#footnote-2)

And they fish all night long and catch nothing. And they hear a voice calling to them from the beach, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” Children. They went back to what they knew, back to what was comfortable, back to what was safe. And it didn’t work. Children. Did you catch any fish? How are you? Are you doing okay? How is your life? Are you satisfied with the things you are doing? Are you happy? Do you have any fish? Do you have anything to show for how it is that you spend your time? How is it working with you being in charge instead of trusting in God? Instead of listening for God’s voice?

Try the other side, Jesus says. Try something different. “Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” Now, you may think that’s not how fishing works, but that is how God works. Take a risk. Trust. Believe that with God, dead people don’t stay dead and broken people don’t stay broken. Try the other side of the boat. If life is not working out the way that you had hoped, try the other side of the boat.

 If we really believe in the power of resurrection, we have to believe that Jesus will make a way even when it doesn’t seem like there is a way. We have to listen to the Holy Spirit even when it doesn’t make sense.  We have to believe that God is working for good, and healing and wholeness.  So, when something is broken, God wants to heal it.  As faithful Christians we don’t accept that God doesn’t win.  God always wins.  If something is wrong, God is working for it to be right. So many problems in the world are overwhelming, so we stay in the boat familiar with what we know.  Rather than risk believing that it will be different or better.

I had a friend who got married pretty soon after graduating college. She was about to walk down the aisle, and she turned to me and said, “Well, I could always get divorced.” I can remember thinking, “What? If you aren’t sure, don’t do it!” But, she did get married that day and she is still married today. But I think of that story because sometimes we feel more comfortable doing what we know rather than risk trying something new.

 We have to be reminded who we are and what we are called to be. And we are challenged to get back in the boat and try again. And try again. And try again. Jesus calls us to be disciples and to cast our nets for justice again and again. As a pastor I have been blessed beyond measure to learn from people who have decided to become a part of a church family because they are ready to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. People who have been searching for meaning in their lives, searching for a community of faith with like-minded people who are loving God with all that they are and loving their neighbor as they love themselves.

After college I lived in Japan for a year teaching English. To go to church I had to take a bus for thirty minutes, ride a train for 3 stops, and then walk for 20 minutes. When I got to worship, I had to put on headphones and tune the Walkman I was given to a certain station where a volunteer would translate worship into English. I yearned for a community of fellow Christians who loved God and loved their neighbor and wanted to make this world be a better place. To be in that place worshipping God with others who loved God and loved each other made me feel God’s peace all around me. It made me feel like God’s presence was filling my heart with comfort and joy and strength.

On Christmas Eve, I went to work at the school like it was any other workday and then I traveled my normal route to church for Christmas Eve worship, but there were no headphones and Walkman to pick up. The person who normally translated worship from Japanese to English had gone to visit family for the Christmas holidays. I remember being in that sanctuary having no idea what was being said, and yet I knew that we were all celebrating that God had become one of us in Jesus. We were giving thanks to God that God was with us and that God was one of us.

Life with Jesus means that we have an opportunity to try life on the other side of the boat. Take a risk. Try something different. Trust. Believe that with God, dead people don’t stay dead and broken people don’t stay broken. Jesus the Christ offers us abundant life now, today. There are as many responses to Easter today as there were then.[[3]](#footnote-3) Some people will worship at Jesus’ feet, some will tell others, some will return to the safety of their homes, and some people will hide. But there is no need to hide. Jesus knows where we live. Jesus stands at the seashore, at the front doors of our lives and offers us freedom from the routines of what we always do, freedom to get our hands dirty, to serve and serve in ways more abundant than we could have imagined. May we cast our net on the other side and let the risen Christ fill our net more abundantly, more joyously than we could ever imagine. Thanks be to God, Amen.

1. http://www.patheos.com/Progressive-Christian/Run-Cant-Hide-Alyce-McKenzie-04-08-2013.html [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.patheos.com/Progressive-Christian/Run-Cant-Hide-Alyce-McKenzie-04-08-2013?offset=1&max=1 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://www.patheos.com/Progressive-Christian/Run-Cant-Hide-Alyce-McKenzie-04-08-2013?offset=1&max=1 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)