

Fishing Lessons

Revelation 5:11-14 John 21:1-19

Preached by Richard Bolin at Culver-Palms United Methodist Church

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This is Wesley Weekend at the Wesley Foundation at Virginia Tech University. The activities have been on the calendar for a long time. It is a celebration event planned to include students, parents and alumni of the United Methodist campus ministry. If you visit the Virginia Tech Wesley Foundation website you will see a picture of the school mascot with a tear in his eye. There are words of mourning. There is a poem of comfort and hope posted by a student. There are notes of concern and prayer posted by church members and other campus ministries from around the nation. And there is the note that Wesley Weekend is still scheduled to go on. "In the midst of this time of confusion and chaos, it is more important than ever for our Wesley family to gather together as one," says the announcement. "The strong sense of community and support from our Wesley alumni and parents provides strength for all of us to heal and recover. Wesley Weekend will be a true testament to the power that we each have to help each other. Please join us this weekend..."

Our response to the Virginia Tech tragedy is for the church to be the church.

Our Staff-Parish Relations Committee met on Tuesday evening this past week. Kimberly is the chairperson and I was very grateful for her leadership. She began as always with a moment of devotion and prayer. She shared her reflection that when watching the coverage of the Virginia Tech shooting it seemed beyond comprehension, with no answer to the question "Why?" But the affirmation that kept coming to her was that the ministry of the Church is crucial. The world cries out for authentic community where grieving persons are held in love and where lonely persons find inclusion and friendship. Sharing the love of Christ is a crucial mission. Our response to the Virginia Tech tragedy is for the church to be the church.

Let us pray ... may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

At the end of the Gospel of John we find Peter fishing again with his disciple friends up at the Lake. Maybe, he thinks to himself, this is how the story ends. Jesus called us away from our ordinary lives. We followed him on a 3-year adventure. We knew difficulties and joys; power and failure. Our hearts burned within us in the presence of this great prophet. We ran when he was crucified. We rejoiced at his resurrection. We realize now who he really is, the very incarnation of God.

Having been through all of this, Peter and his friends have come home. They are a bit out of breath, perhaps; a bit dizzy from all they had witnessed and pondered, these simple fishermen to whom the great mysteries of life have been revealed. And now what is there for them to do? - other than to go back home, to go back to the familiar surroundings and tasks which had been theirs before Jesus came along. Now they can live

out their days with fond memories and a sense of inner peace, knowing they have received the gift of eternal life. Or can they?

"I'm going fishing," says Peter. "We'll go with you," say the others. They fish all night long, but they catch nothing.

Just after daybreak a stranger appears on the shore. "Have you caught anything?" he wants to know. They confess that they have caught nothing. "Put your net down again, on the right side of the boat." They follow instructions, the net is full, and something tells the men in the boat that the man on the shore is no stranger.

Jesus has come again to the shores of Galilee, just as he had come a few years earlier. He enables them to have an abundant catch of fish, but he has something more in mind than fishing lessons. He has come once again to call them away from their nets. His appearance to them is a source of joy, but he comes mainly to challenge them, perhaps even to scold them a bit.

To Simon Peter he says, "Do you love me more than these?" These what? Jesus wasn't referring to these other people standing near them. Jesus was referring to all these things: this boat, these nets, and this house on the shores of the Galilean Sea. "Do you love me more than these"... these familiar surroundings? Why are you hanging around here? There is work to do.

"If you love me, then feed my sheep."

Jesus comes to Peter and other disciples on the shores of the Sea of Galilee to say that it is time to be the church. That means that it is time to go deeper and to go beyond the familiar and the comfortable. You remember that three-year journey we took from Galilee to Jerusalem, from the mountaintop to the crucifixion to the resurrection? That wasn't just about your personal salvation. It was not a spiritual journey that ends with personal enlightenment and then enjoying the good life back at the lake. No, this is just the beginning of the mission to establish the kingdom of God, create the beloved community, make real what I taught you to pray for every day, that God's "will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Today is Earth Day. At Culver-Palms UMC we have turned Earth Day into Earth Month. So we have begun this Easter season by connecting the themes of resurrection and renewal of the earth. And each week, as we have pondered the traditional scripture lessons of the season, we have seen that there is a biblical imperative to care for the earth.

On Easter Sunday we said that the new life that is resurrection life involves all of life. Resurrection does not have to do only with humanity, but all of creation.

Last Sunday we noted that it is to our corporate benefit that God does not order nature to our individual convenience - the converse is also true, that we imperil creation when we selfishly seek to bend nature to our individual convenience. The peace that Jesus breathes upon us is God's Spirit of reconciliation. To live in sync with God is to live in harmony with creation,

And today we note that Jesus' instruction to "feed my sheep" is not limited to Peter, nor to one generation. Rather we should see the connection between the instruction of Jesus and the law of the Iroquois nation, that in every deliberation we must consider the impact upon the seventh generation.

From the Christian satirical magazine *Door*, comes this list of "Ten Things People Won't Say When They See the Christian Bumper Sticker or More Subtle Fish Symbol on Your Car":

10. Look, let's stop that car and ask those folks how we can become Christians.
 9. Don't worry, Billy, those people are Christians – they must have a good reason for driving 90 miles an hour.
 8. What a joy to be sharing the highway with another car of Spirit-filled brothers and sisters.
 7. Isn't it wonderful how God blessed that Christian couple with a brand-new BMW?
 6. How come people who drive like that don't get thrown in jail?
Son, that driver is a Christian and God probably protects him from getting arrested. Dad, can we get a bumper sticker like that?
 5. Stay clear of those folks, Martha. If they get raptured, that car's gonna be all over the road!
 4. Oh, look! That Christian woman is getting a chance to share Jesus with a police officer.
 3. No, that's not garbage coming out of their windows, Bert; it's probably gospel tracts for the road workers.
 2. Oh boy, we're in trouble! We just rear-ended one of God's cars.
 1. Quick, Alice, honk the horn or they won't know that we love Jesus!
- Personally, I am more drawn to the bumper sticker that says, "If you love Jesus, tithe! Anyone can honk."

If you love me, feed my sheep. Jesus calls us to more than bumper sticker Christianity.

If you love Jesus, then share God's love with all of God's children, including generations yet to be born.

If you love Jesus, live faithfully!

Yesterday Donald Strauss of Antioch University gave a slideshow presentation in our Fellowship Hall that shared and updated the content of the documentary film, "An Inconvenient Truth." In the question and answer period afterwards he made what was for me a compelling point. Over the long history of our planet, in the natural ebb and flow of our atmosphere, carbon dioxide has been released and processed and sequestered away in the depths of the earth. In a hundred million years the earth has formed it into deposits of coal and petroleum. Now we have figured out how to extract that carbon. We burn it for our fuels and release it into the atmosphere. That which the earth dealt with and sequestered away over a hundred million years we can use up and put back in the atmosphere in just 1,000 years, and that is what we are doing. Now our scientists tell us that by doing so we imperil future generations. Those who are included in Jesus' admonition, "feed my sheep," are being choked by our unsustainable economy.

Our response to the environmental issues of our day is for the church to be the church. For the church to be the church means that we must live faithfully for the sake of future generations. For the church to be the church means that we must name our carbon-based energy consumption as human sin. For the church to be the church we must lead the way in moving toward sustainable lifestyles, which is defined as living in such a way that if every person on the planet were to live it, we could all do so indefinitely into the future.

Even if global warming were not an issue, the changes we are urged to make should still be done just because they are the right thing to do:

to move from a consumption society to a sustainable society;
to move from extravagance to simplicity;
to change the pace of our living from faster to slower;
to move from accumulation to generosity;

These lessons have been handed down to us as the wisdom of the ages. Those who could not imagine the present forms of our destructive capability, nevertheless intuitively warned of the destructive magnitude of our selfishness.

Let us care for all creation, and joyfully share Christ's love. Amen.