**Sermon 2-24-19**

**Paul Purdue preaching**

**Awake!**

I love this image: Jesus cooking breakfast as the sea laps against the shoreline in the pre-dawn light. The disciples’ voices drift over the water to Christ come as cook. Jesus builds a fire, lets it burn down to coals, mixes flour and spoons little flour cakes into the now simmering oil. As the bread rises, disciples, who once left everything, fish for fish. Imagine the details... Jesus carrying skillet, oil, flour, fresh citrus, olives, down to the beach so as to cook breakfast for those he loves. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, crucified, dead, and buried; on the third day risen from the dead, soon to ascend into heaven and sit down at the right hand of God Almighty, stills the storms, walks on the water, heals the sick: Jesus cooks breakfast. Unseen, Jesus watches his friends haul in empty nets with sullen tones. He knows the answer before he will ask: “Children, have you any fish?”

These docks, these boats, these nets, this sea, make the sanctuary where Jesus first called the disciples to “follow”. **Here, we pledged to “leave everything behind and follow Jesus**.” Some might want Jesus to punish them you by cursing their fishing, but Jesus gives another miraculous payday, filling their nets to overflowing: 153 fish. In the first call story, Jesus asks Peter to take down the drying nets, relaunch the boat, and push out into deep water. Here, Jesus asks for less: “Children, do you have any fish?” Jesus instructs, “Cast your net on the other side of the boat.” The fish fill the nets so fully they couldn’t haul in the net, needing to row to shore to heave in the miracle catch. .

The early church patriarchs and matriarchs, our first theologians, loved analogy and parables. Perhaps today, we might well remember that. Jerome said that the 153 fish represented the 153 documented fish species at that time. What a beautiful image! 153 species, for we are called to work for all people- Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, Romans, Jews, proselytes, Greeks, Arabs, Gentiles, Samaritans, Ethiopians, Eunuchs, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philippians… 153 or every person in the whole world.

The first time Jesus called, Peter fell to his knees in worship and confessed his fear and sense of inadequacy, “Lord, leave me, for I am a sinner.” This time Peter puts on his tunic and dives into the water, refusing to swim to Jesus in his speedo. Yeah, it is a funny image, but it stuck in John’s mind. Maybe that picture speaks of honoring or our fears of  being uncovered before God. I love how Peter abandons his crew, nets, and huge payday, diving into the sea to swim to Jesus. After all, you can all clean fish any day- the unexpected worship encounter is a treasure.

“When they landed, these tired and hungry sailors saw a fire with fish on it and some bread.” Evidently Jesus brought a hook and wetted a line. Jesus, our gracious host, invites us to add our gifts to the sacred feast. “Bring some of the fish that you’ve caught.” At Jesus’ request, Peter leaves Jesus and pulls in the miraculously full and untorn net. Jesus calls us to leave our laboring and to “come and have breakfast.”

Now John, as Gospel Studio’s Director of Cinematography, will not zoom in so that we might hear what they talked about. John prefers a wide angle shot of the friends feasting on shore as the sun dances on their faces. John only tells us that “***none of the disciples could bring themselves to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ They knew it was the Lord.”*** John leaves some mystery, doubt, and a taste of wonder- room for faith. See this word picture: “***Jesus came, took the bread, and gave it to them.***” How is it that Jesus keeps mysteriously meeting us as we break the bread and take the cup? “***Jesus did the same with the fish.”*** No doubt we disciples remember how Christ feed 5,000 with a child’s lunch. But we do not know what each disciple said to Jesus; the camera stays wide.

Each disciple might have confessed how their courageous pledges fell short when facing the cross. ***John only gives us Jesus’ private conversation with Peter***. Let us remember that the scene shifts as John writes, “***When they finished eating, Jesus asked Peter “do you love me more than these nets, or boats, or whatever?”*** Indeed, careful readers will see that Jesus and Peter take a walk down the beach away from the dishes and fish cleaning. John trails behind them. It is during private, in confidence, conversation, that Jesus asks Peter three times, “do you love me?”  The Greek reads that “***Peter was cut to the heart”*** by Jesus’ repeated questioning of his love. Jesus’ three questions match Peter’s three repeated denials. **We miss Jesus’ kindness if we imagine Jesus grilling Peter before the Board of Disciples during the business portion of the breakfast meeting**. Jesus restores Peter in the private sacredness of the confessional booth. This is Jesus’ way of being. Jesus waits until the angry crowd drops their stones, and leaves the scene **before saying to us alone: “*go and sin no more*”. S**aul of Tarsus’ co-conspirators saw the light, but never heard Jesus’ voice move like a scalpel through Paul’s hate-filled heart. Oh yes, Jesus calls out the crowd and the church in order to address systemic evil, but **Jesus never seeks to shame or embarrass us. Love never shames.**

Imagine yourselves inside the story. Jesus asks, “Do you love me more than these possessions, this career track, this comfort, or these whatever it might be?“ “Yes, Lord,” we answer. “Feed my lambs!” Jesus asks a second time, “Do you love me with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind?” Do we say, “Yes, Lord”? “Then nourish others as tenderly as you care for your people.” That third time cuts into your heart, as Jesus probes your soul, “Do you love really me?” “Lord, you know everything, you know exactly how much I love you.” “*Then, tend to my flock, and be assured, Peter, Paul, Heather, Nel, that even though my yoke is easier, and my burden lifts you up, it will not be easy… you will be persecuted, riviled, and lied about for doing right, even as you find joy in my kingdom. So* ***take up your cross and follow me.”*** *(*Matthew 5, 16)

Jesus tells Peter about his suffering for the faith. Peter will take up the cross. Church tradition tells us that Peter was crucified for the faith.

**Next Sunda**y, we will gather at our Lord’s Table. We may come rejoicing with the news that our denomination has opened hearts, opened doors, opened minds and made a safer space for all people by blessing all marriages, and allowing everyone space to answer God’s call. However, we may come with sadness. **St. Louis may come as a cross. We may struggle to see J**esus; We may be tempted to go back to fishing,  we may wonder where Jesus is. We may not know Belmont’s next step. **But hear these words from Jesus, who silently sits on the shoreline preparing a feast for us**: “***Tend my lambs; if you love me, care for my flock; if you are nourished by love then nourish one another, watch over each other in love. Follow me. There are 153 kinds of people to work for. Take up your cross and follow me. Come let us build on earth a community of love and justice, as in heaven.”***

I love that image of tending to sheep, caring for the flock. **One Christmas**, my uncle Clellon, recovering from the flu, spent hours walking the hollars and creek beds of his Kentucky farm seeking a lost calf. He and his dog Frisky searched for the calf in a hard 30 degree rain. The Christmas feasting waiting until the calf nursed from her mother again, safely warming inside the dry barn, insulated with hay above her, her body making steam as her mother licked her clean. If we are to be Good Shepherds, we must tend to the runaway calves and listen to a mother’s  lowing for herblost children.

But **instead of seeing the deep needs of the world or noticing the thorny crown scars  on Christ’s brow, we tend to take our eyes off serving and worship and look at “them**”.  Like  Peter, we know what hard work God calls us to do, but we look over and see John, or Jefferson or Heather, and ask, “***what about them?***” How do we follow Jesus when we are watching to see what happens to “them”? Why do we ask “Lord, what about them?” Do we feel “If I am going to suffer, then I sure hope that they do too”? Do we promise “Lord, if she does… I will never….”? **Do we let others influence God’s call for us saying “**Lord, if those jokers…, I can promise you that…”?

**What makes us worry about Jesus’ plan for others? Perhaps- sin?**Oh **there is a time for rebuke, a time to turn over tables in the temple, call out injustice and publicize spiritual hypocrisy, but Jesus is down in the weeds of Peter’s heart, s**eeking to save him from jealousy, discord, bitterness and the like. **Hear Jesus’ healing word: “*that’s not a concern for yo*u.”**

“That is not a concern for you” **echos our deepest ethical call to “*l****ove enemies, love neighbors, love strangers, love one another, do good to haters, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Absorb an insult- defy them by offering a the other check, resist them whistling as you carry the enforced pack an extra mile… Treat others as you want to treated! Love, do the right thing, and give, expecting nothing in return. Expect nothing in return and gain everything! Show mercy and you become merciful- fully a children of the Most High; for God is merciful; so like God, be awake, strong, courageous, full of mercy, and doing everything in love!*  (Luke 6)

So no matter what this week brings, let us love God and tend to each other. Let us bring healing to the hurting. **Let us not ask** *‘what about them’,* but resolve to live out our understanding of Jesus’ call for Belmont. **Friends, somebody needs to reach those 153 different kinds of people that God loves.** And let us remember, **even when we are way off task- fishing for fish and coming up empty- Jesus kneels silently on the shoreline- listening- watching- cooking a little breakfast feast for us all.** Amen.