

How is our World ever going to overcome the divisiveness and anger we have come to expect as normal? How is our Nation ever going to become One nation under God? When neighbors kill one another over using their Leaf Blower, or shooting in their backyard, when we are so afraid as to shoot persons for getting into the wrong car in a parking lot, or coming to the wrong address?

This is a wonderful familiar, comforting passage, filled with sensory images, the core of which is forgiveness. The problem being that in our comfort and familiarity we often overlook the point!

In the weeks that followed the Crucifixion, one evening Simon Peter said "I am going fishing."

Just as in early morning the fish often bite, they do at sunset as mosquitos and other winged creatures brood over the face of the waters. However, the Bible regularly names bad things can happen in the dark, especially out on the chaos of the waters. One possibility for understanding what is happening comes in recalling PETER DENIED EVEN KNOWING JESUS THREE TIMES, THE NIGHT BEFORE THE CRUCIFIXION, and concluding that Peter was going fishing, in the dark, on the water, to take his life.

At the very least, instead of going in the direction Jesus had led, healing people, feeding the hungry, teaching, preaching, challenging the authorities and tradition; Peter was going back to fishing, as they had made their lives before Jesus' calling. So Doubting Thomas, Nathaniel who questioned if Anything Good could come from Nazareth, James and John the fishermen who had competed for who gets to sit beside Jesus in Paradise, all make certain to not let Simon Peter out of sight, so they go fishing.

Part of my love of this passage is that in 1964 my parents bought a home on Torch Lake in N. Michigan, there are several of this church, who this time of year tell me they are headed to Torch Lake. That first summer, our family met a family in the same cove who had a daughter a year younger than I and a year older than my little brother. Every summer, then in High School with her future husband Jeff, we were inseparable, playing games, swimming, sailing, water skiing, eventually getting married the same summer, later raising our children together. Marilyn and Jeff are here this morning. Part of God's sense of humor, is that during summers Marilyn & Jeff, along with Clair & John Howell and Lucinda Waldren all go to the Presbyterian church together in Denver.

I share all of that, because each summer when we were little, we would work to prepare the leaky rowboat her father built called Bit O Sweden, or our old Rowboat called The Wart, to go fishing. No matter how hard we worked cleaning and preparing boats, buying worms, minnows, packing lunches and sunscreen, our father's towing those boats across the Lake to Clam River or down to Torch River; we Never Ever caught anything. Yet, 50 years later, the year after we sold our family's home, someone caught a 55" 50 pound Muskellunge right in front of our home, where we used to swim.

All night long, the disciples caught nothing, at sunrise Jesus called telling them to cast on the other side, where they caught 153 different fish. Remember what Jesus had Called the Disciples to be, instead of fishermen? And at this time in the Roman world there were known to be 153 different human languages.

But then there is this odd footnote in the text. That when Simon Peter heard it was the Lord, he put on his clothes because he had stripped for work and jumped into the water, while the others rowed to shore. If you were in a swimming suit or stripped for skinny-dipping, WHY WOULD YOU PUT CLOTHES ON TO SWIM TO SHORE? If anything he ought to have done the reverse. The only other occasion I can find in all of Scripture, where someone was naked and put on clothes before being with GOD or Jesus, takes us back to the Garden of Eden, when Eve and Adam had done what God told them not to do, and they made clothes to hide their nakedness and shame from God.

We started this morning naming that this was a sensory passage, so we have Peter's feelings of shame and guilt and confession; the weight of his wet clothes; the dark of night; on the shore Jesus has built a

fire for them to warm themselves. The warmth, the smell of smoke, the crackling of flames. Ooooh, at each of the 3 times Peter was asked if he were: One of Them, One of Jesus' followers, IF he knew Jesus, Peter had been warming himself by an outdoor fire!

I named our sermon this morning "A LEAP OF FAITH" because this passage is different from anything else in the Bible. Ordinarily we have Narrative, there are births, there are wars, there are healings, there is prophecy, there are miraculous healings. The conclusion of John is different, calling us to make a LEAP OF FAITH, to truly heal the wounds and brokenness between us.

When they finished eating, (Does that remind you of Jesus' Last Supper?)

Jesus asked Peter "Do you love me more than these?" Here, I believe, what Jesus is comparing by "more than these", is: more than your old life as a fisherman, more than the life you chose by denying knowing Jesus, denying you were part of the body of Christ that night, even more than the life you have lived since the Crucifixion. Do you love me more than those versions of yourself?

In response, to Peter's "Yes Lord, you know I love you?" Jesus gives Peter responsibility "Feed my lambs." Following Jesus' example, **teach** new believers. A second time "Do you love me?" "Care for my sheep." Which I take Jesus to mean **heal the sick** and feed the 5000.

To understand the importance of Jesus asking a 3rd time, we have to understand **Jewish Culture**. In all legal matters, when you get married or divorced, in front of witnesses you need to state three times "I divorce you!" So when Jesus asked Peter a 3rd time, just as with denying Jesus 3 times, Jesus was asking him to make a legally binding vow of Confession and Commitment: "Do you love me?"

In response, Jesus foretells how Simon Peter is going to die, not as a curse, but as a relief! For most of us, having the doctor say "This is how you will die..." "You have cancer" or "You have been Drafted" feel like a death-sentence; but taken differently, "**Simon Peter, Son of John, you are not going to drown going fishing! You are not going to be stabbed with a sword in battle! You are not going to be stoned to death! When you have lived a full life, you will stretch out your arms and become a symbol for glorifying God!**"

Do you recall how Simon Peter died? Nero ordered him executed. Peter declared that Following Jesus he had witnessed how the world is completely upside down, so he asked to be crucified upside down.

After which, Jesus said to Peter, what he had said back when he first called him: "**Follow me!**"

Jesus could have simply appeared to Peter on the shore and said "On the Cross I forgave you." Or he could have asked Peter 3 times to confess what he believes, absolving the 3 denials, but by making this into a new FOLLOW ME, I believe we have a Leap of Faith, from Jesus the Teacher, Jesus the Healer, Jesus who died on the Cross; to the RESURRECTED JESUS extending Forgiveness. Doing so, we need to re-examine every story in the Bible and our lives, questioning how could this be our Call from GOD/ from Jesus to recognize ourselves: "Follow Me."

Years ago, my family had a friend who was a preacher named Jim, and his son who was called J; got involved in selling drugs, went away to prison, and all the while I knew their family the son never returned. I recall the father describing that his life had become the story of the Prodigal Son. HOWEVER, where our emphasis is often on the child who finally comes to himself and makes his way home; Jim named that the real emphasis of that story is on the Father, and just like the Biblical Father every night Jim went out and searched the horizon wishing and praying that his child would come home. Jim claimed that if ever he had seen him, he would have run and leaped for faith to be re-united. Recently, I learned that Jim had died, and at his funeral his son J did come home and wept.