

WANDERING HEART: FIGURING OUT FAITH WITH PETER¹

John 21:1-17, 19b ~ "Here's My Heart"

Second Sunday of Easter ~ April 7, 2024 ~ Service of Healing and Wholeness

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Introduction to Second Scripture Lesson:

I jumped out of a boat at sea once. And then I swam as fast as I could to the shore. Unlike Peter, I wasn't swimming to Jesus. We were at a Davis family reunion—yes, I was a full-fledged adult with two children watching me do this impulsive, breaking-the-rules thing. Our extended Davis family was out on a day cruise off the shore of Cozumel, Mexico. Remember when I told you about the sea bands that Fran, my mother-in-law, gave to me to ward off sea sickness? Well, I had forgotten them that day. And the water was extremely choppy. So, with my insides churning, the moment I saw the shore was a swimmable distance, I jumped! My body took over my better judgment at that point.

Picture Peter that morning in his fishing boat on the Sea of Tiberius, despondent and distraught. He had done so many things wrong, just as Jesus had predicted. And even going back to what he knew, fishing, didn't work, either. Peter was at the end of his rope. Then he sees this man on the shore and doesn't recognize him. Not even *after* hearing his voice. Not even *after* the man's fishing advice yielded a miraculous catch of fish. It was not until John, the Beloved Disciple, tipped him off: "It is the Lord!" did he realize it was Jesus there on the shore. Then Peter's body did the rest. He jumped in the water and swam as fast as he could toward Jesus. His Lord and his friend whom he'd denied and abandoned, when the going got tough. Peter knew he had sinned. Big time. And *yet* he swam as fast as he could toward him. Peter dove in and swam toward his only hope for healing and wholeness.

Which began with a meal: A charcoal fire, and grill master Jesus with fish and bread ready to serve his weary, famished disciples. We will never know what they talked about as they hungrily devoured this meal. I guess that wasn't important. What mattered was who cooked it, who broke the bread and shared it. What we *do know* about is the conversation Jesus had with Peter, after breakfast. Which is where our second scripture lesson begins:

Sermon

"Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" There was no stern lecture. No reprimand. Instead, a meal together and then the same question three times. It wasn't a theological question. It wasn't about what he believed or didn't believe. *It was purely relational: Do you love me?* If so, here's what you must do: "Feed my sheep. Tend my sheep. I have done my work on this earth. *Now it is up to you.* God must love the world, through you now that I have been raised and about to ascend into heaven.

It's really a second call story. And it's a continuation of the lesson he taught them by washing their feet at the Last Supper. Showing them what love looks like, feels like, tastes like. I see it as John's version of the Matthew 25:31-46 call to love and serve "the least of these." The

hungry, the thirsty, the sick, the stranger, the prisoner. My sheep in need. 99 out of 100 is not enough. *All* of my flock. That's how you follow me. And when you do these things, that's how you will see me. And serve me.

What does this command, this call, this invitation, really mean to Peter, to each of us, and to the church? To love Christ "more than these" means that we are giving our primary allegiance, our first thought, our mid-day "how will I get through this afternoon", our fall-onto-our-pillow exhausted selves to the One who will stretch us. The One who will lead us to care about people we think we'd rather not be bothered with. Yes, to follow Jesus, means we are following the one who will keep expanding, keep stretching our current idea of what "loving our neighbor" really means. All people and all of God's creation, plants, animals, our dear planet earth.

This connection, this call did not just start when God sent the human being Jesus to this earth. This connection between God's mercy and God's call to action runs throughout our biblical story. Remember Moses and the burning bush? Moses, like Peter, was on the run the day he had his burning-bush experience out in the wild. He had messed up big time, too. In Exodus 3:1-15, we find a nature experience and one that follows an experience of failure and suffering on the part of Moses. The voice Moses hears from the burning bush telling him to confront the pharaoh and tell him to let his slaves go! The action leads the way. As Father Richard Rohr teaches us, "*You do not think yourself into a new way of living as much as you live yourself into a new way of thinking.*" Figuring out faith with Peter all these weeks has highlighted this truth for us. Like Peter, like Moses, God gives us a primary inner experience—and that inner-fire immediately has social, economic, and political implications.ⁱⁱ

That's right: Jesus' call to love is never abstract. And it is always urgent. It is why we are a church. Our call is this: "*Faith expressing itself in love*" as Brian McLaren puts it in his book, *Faith After Doubt*. Isn't this exactly what Jesus is calling Peter and the rest of us to do? To be a people with our hearts engaged in "faith expressing itself in love"? "People of all ages, especially young adults are hungry for this: a church that welcomes the passionate young seeker into a deep adult lifestyle of empathy, kindness, and compassion, where love is the prime directive, the greatest thing, the most excellent way, the Harmony way, as indigenous theologian Randy Woodley, describes the Cherokee idea of the Harmony Way."

I see FPC striving to be a community of faith expressing ourselves in love.ⁱⁱⁱ From our new "Reach for the Sun" Solar panel project we launch officially today that you will hear more about from Dana Talsness; to hosting the Mobile Mexican Consulate last year for the first time and will do so again in June, where hundreds of our hard-working undocumented neighbors gain access to legal advocacy they could not obtain otherwise; to the organic, explosive growth of our Parish Medical Equipment Loan closet providing free equipment medical equipment on loan to any who have need; to our new confirmation curriculum based on this core call of Jesus. These are some concrete examples of how we are diving into, running toward Jesus' call to action. Not because we have our stuff together. Not because we have it all figured out. Only because we know we love Jesus. And hear Christ's call to "Follow me."

Let's bring it home, and bring this series to a close like this: Take a breath, place your hand on your heart, feel it beating and pulsing life through your beautiful body... Where is your wandering heart right now? To whom or to what *are you giving your heart most often, most passionately?* Repeat this after me: *Here's my heart, Lord. Take and seal it--seal it for thy courts above.* There are so many voices shouting for our attention; our passion; our time, our dollars, our vote. Ads pop up on our phones, our screens, imploring us to buy, invest, support, sign up, "Please subscribe!"

In the midst of this cacophony, open your eyes and ears and your nose. Do you hear the voice calling from the shore? Can you catch a whiff? Jesus is grilling you some fish and handing you some bread. Taste and see, experience grace, dished up, grace poured out, for you. Healing your brokenness. Then Jesus looks you in the eye and asks: *"Do you love me more than these?"* Then here's what you must do: Take care of my sheep. And the pasture. Nothing more and nothing less. Put your love into action. Dive in and swim.

ⁱ A Sanctified Art LLC/ sanctifiedart.org Lenten Theme 2024 Series.

ⁱⁱ Richard Rohr, *Yes, And... Daily Meditations*, (Franciscan Media: Cincinnati, OH, 201), pp.35

ⁱⁱⁱ Brian D. McLaren, *Faith after Doubt: Why Your Beliefs Stopped Working and What to do About It*, (St. Martins: New York, NY, 2021), p. 137.