

Meadowbrook Congregational Church

“Keeping Easter”

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John 21: 1-19

21 After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. *2* 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. *3* 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.

4 Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. *5* Jesus said to them, ‘Children, you have no fish, have you?’ They answered him, ‘No.’ *6* 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. *7* 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 lake. *8* 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.

9 When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. *10* Jesus said to them, ‘Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.’ *11* So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. *12* 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. *13* Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. *14* This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my lambs.’ *16* A second time he said to him, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Tend my sheep.’ *17* He said to him the third time, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ And he said to him, ‘Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my sheep.’ *18* Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you

do not wish to go.’¹⁹ (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, ‘Follow me.’

Easter seemed a bit different in the Ritter household this year. For the first time in twenty years, no one boiled and colored eggs. We were either too old or too busy. The activities of the Easter bunny were also greatly curtailed. In previous years Maren and Amelia and I always were left huge Easter baskets with lots of surprises. The Easter bunny always seemed to forget Laura! I don't know why that happened? This year however the bunny left Amelia and me a couple of much smaller baskets with only a modest amount of candy. The most notable difference for me was the absence of the Easter grass that goes in the bottom of the basket. Usually that stuff ended up all over the house. There is less of it lying around than previous years. I used to grow tired of picking it up off the carpet, the furniture, and even the dog's back. It seemed as if the Easter season ended when you found the last of the Easter grass!

Although we in the midst of the Easter season, Easter Sunday itself is two weeks in our rearview mirror. Today we read the last of the Easter scriptures and sing the last of the Easter hymns. We fondly recall the day itself. The lilies and tulips were beautiful. The triumphant music was fantastic. The choir and soloists did a magnificent job. The children were fun to watch in their bright outfits, gathering eggs on the church lawn. But all of that is like a distant experience now. Easter is over. Our Easter celebration is an historical account, as much as the account of Jesus' resurrection that we read two weeks ago. We must admit that is not easy to feel "Easter" two weeks after the fact.

I find some comfort in knowing that I am not alone in my post-Easter sentiment. The Scripture lesson from the gospel of John tells of the disciples and their struggle with their post-Easter feelings. It was after Easter, perhaps even on a difficult Monday morning after a fantastic weekend. The disciples' celebration of Easter didn't include baskets of eggs and chocolates or worship featuring early services and special anthems. It wasn't marked on a calendar. The first Easter was a little less obvious. The disciples were still dealing with the mystery of strange appearances by the resurrected Jesus. Jesus had appeared to them and had engaged them in some rather baffling conversations. They were puzzled by the strange manifestations of the Risen Christ. He had come to them but was a bit difficult to recognize. They gathered together, hopeful yet perhaps still confused and frightened, wondering what to do next. How does the high of the news of resurrection translate into the low of another uncertain Monday morning at the office?

Peter had a suggestion. He said to the others, "I am going fishing." While we might laugh at such a simple suggestion, it really wasn't very strange. Fishing is what many of the disciples did before they met Jesus. It was their job and their vocation. It was all they knew how to do. Come to think of it, the disciples weren't really very good at being disciples until much later after Easter. They didn't understand what Jesus taught them. They fell asleep when they should have stayed awake. They denied Jesus and betrayed Jesus. They didn't seem to grasp what was going on. So now immediately after Easter they were perfectly content to return to what they were doing before all of this confusing death and resurrection stuff happened.

Although we profess to dread it, there is something comforting about an ordinary life, a regular schedule and a plain routine. And so in pursuit of such comfort the disciples went fishing.

Apparently the disciples weren't so good at fishing either. The story tells us that they went out in a boat, fished all night, but did not catch a thing. That is when the Risen Christ appeared to them again. It was at sunrise. I wouldn't think that this time of day was an accident of fate. Jesus appeared as a new day was dawning. Night was ending. He stood at the edge of the water but still the disciples did not know who he was. But they heard him call out to them, "Young men, have you caught any fish?"

In his book *Sermons: Biblical Wisdom for Daily Living*, noted preacher Peter Gomes spends a couple of pages on this single question; "Young men, have you caught any fish?" He writes that Jesus was very much like a good lawyer who never asks a question to which he didn't already know the answer. He explains that the question is not the pure rhetorical question that it may seem to us. On that day after Easter, Jesus was asking a much deeper question, "Young men, have you caught any fish? How are you doing? How are you getting along in your work? What are you working toward? What do you have to show for your labors? Are you satisfied with what you are doing?" Have you caught any fish was another way of asking if they were finding life meaningful.

The disciples answered, "Not a thing." Gomes points out that this is an answer most of us would give after Easter. Easter is over and we have gone back to our normal experience of life. We expect the same old dead ends and limits. We continue to fish out of the same side of the boat, even with continually empty nets. Gomes writes, "We have little to show for all of the energy, labor, imagination, and investment that we put into our lives and our work." We go about our business expecting nothing to be changed and thus nothing in our lives and our world gets changed.

A friend was telling me about her husband's effort to mow the lawn. He had a trusty old mower that he had nursed into use for many years. It was continually breaking down and he was continually fixing it. Most of the time it ran on fumes and prayers. Last spring she purchased for him a brand new mower-self propelled, mulching, push button start. She told me however that her husband still preferred to use the old mower. The brand new mower sat in the corner of the garage while he continued to toil with the familiar but failing machine. He just couldn't bring himself to throw it out and try something new.

Jesus commanded the disciples, "Throw your nets on the other side of the boat." Life is not the same as it was before Easter. Life is now abundant and full, even in the midst of what appears to be the same. Easter is not just a one time historic event, come and gone. It goes on. Easter is not just a future promise of eternal existence. It is a promise kept this day. Jesus told his disciples to stop living as if nothing had changed. Cast your nets on the other side of the boat and start living in Easter joy.

The story didn't end there. After their fishing luck had changed, the disciples sat down for breakfast. I don't know about you, but breakfast isn't the most exciting time of the day for me. My eyes are barely open. My conversation is limited to grunts and groans. My menu consists of an over-ripe banana and cold cereal in my Tony the Tiger bowl. But that is the way I want it. Breakfast isn't a time to experiment with something new and exciting. Breakfast is boring and dull and routine and well-comfortable. Yet at breakfast Jesus appeared again to his disciples. His appearance was another reminder

that if we go about our business in the same old way, the Risen Christ will still find us. If our eyes can be opened in the habits of a breakfast, surely Jesus will find a way to change our attitudes and behaviors in every routine of our life.

Keeping Easter. It is really quite simple. It is recognizing that Easter is present well past one day and one event. It is understanding that Easter is not just a church thing but a life thing. Keeping Easter is opening ourselves up to the possibility that we might be changed. Keeping Easter means that we can hold hope in the chance that the world, our tired, routine, and dreary world might be transformed by the power and promise of the Risen Christ.

The Easter stories of this day are a vivid reminder of the power of the Resurrected Christ. Easter does not end when we come to church seeking the Risen Lord. Easter lives on because that same Risen Christ continues to seek us and to find us in the midst of our ordinary life.