

## **Third Sunday of Easter**

**May 1, 2022**

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**John 21:1-19**

Grief is a complicated emotion. I suspect that all of us can testify in one way or another to that truth. Many years ago Dr Kubler-Ross came out with her “stages of grief,” and people everywhere grabbed on to her process, thinking that finally there was some *logic* that could be applied to this emotion that comes with being human: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance--a neat outline for managing the unmanageable. Only there was a problem--professionals and average people discovered that grief just didn't follow the outline or look like an inverse bell curve, but looked and felt more like a tangle of spaghetti.

We know that--that moment when your brain thinks “I need to call and tell them that,” and almost in the same moment you realize the person has been dead for years. Or a song or a smell or a holiday that whipsaws you back to the first raw days of pain. When you love someone and have lost them, there just is no logic to all the feelings that come at different times and with different intensities.

It's a good thing to remember today as we hear Peter's pronouncement to the other disciples: “I am going fishing.” One part of us might think “Seriously?!” The women told them Jesus had been raised; then Jesus came through locked doors not once but twice, showing them torn hands and injured side; Jesus breathed on them and called them to the ministry of forgiveness--I mean, it hasn't exactly been a normal few days--he's alive! Peter's response seems way out of line, doesn't it?

But nothing quite went the way the disciples expected: Shattered dreams of a warrior messiah. Judas' enthusiasm withered into betrayal. Peter's devotion collapsed in denial. And grief is complicated.

Can you blame Peter, then, for responding to all of this confusion by going back in time to something tangible, something so familiar? “I am going fishing.” And six more disciples say “Me too!” Do you suppose they said it with enthusiasm, or resignation? In any case, a night on the water isn't as reliable as it used to be.

As dawn breaks, there is nothing--no fish in their nets. My gosh, the disappointment! Couldn't one thing be the same, couldn't one thing just work out the way they wanted?!

One of the complicated things about grief is that it doesn't just come when someone dies, does it? Losing a job, the shattering of a relationship, family or friends taking the wrong path, not getting into the school you wanted, a chronic health condition and on--they are all circumstances where the distress and ache of a broken heart and broken dreams overwhelm us at any age and any stage of life.

"If only...how could God let this happen...what do I do now"...and "it wasn't supposed to be this way" become our daily or moment by moment mantras.

We aren't very good at sharing that brokenness with other people, are we? Maybe a few friends, but often not, because we are so afraid of being vulnerable or looking like we can't handle everything life throws our way. For some people, that includes the church community, because we think or have been taught that feeling despair or hurt or anguish somehow shows a lack of faith in God's goodness. Nothing could be further from the truth, of course. We follow a Savior whose whole life and ministry was about vulnerability, and meeting people at their most fragile and human moments.

That is definitely true in today's Gospel. Empty nets are being gathered by weary hands when Jesus appears on the shoreline and begins gathering all the broken pieces to himself: a net filled to overflowing, a drenched disciple, fish, bread, and a conversation around a fire on the beach. Jesus calls Peter by his given name: "Simon, son of John." Not 'the Rock'--the weight of that failed expectation is already so heavy on his shoulders. "Do you love me?" Jesus asks, not because he needs to know, but because Peter needs so badly to say it. A broken and wounded Jesus feeds a broken Peter and calls him again: "Feed my sheep."

None of us travels through this life unbroken. It might sound sentimental or way too simple to say that Jesus treasures us, brokenness and all. But think again how hard that promise is for you to believe. Imagine yourself in that group on the

beach, gathered by One so compassionate, One who has no interest in judgment but only in embracing you in all your complicated humanity.

None of us travels through this life unbroken. But God uses hearts that have been broken and who know the anguish of grief, calling us to be embracers of those who are suffering; those despairing because of injustice; embracers of those who are shoved to the side and broken by indifference or outright hatred.

Responding to the war in Ukraine and the increasing animosity toward all those who are 'different' from the 'norm' (whatever that is!) Pastor John Pavlovitz said this on Friday: "If you are weary right now be grateful. That weariness is confirmation that your heart is working. It is your humanity responding to so much inhumanity around us."

God uses hearts that have been broken to help heal this broken world. Jesus feeds hearts that are broken with a bit of bread and wine today. "For you, for you, for you" we hear again and again. We are embraced by unyielding love, and sent to love.