

Easter, 3, 2016

Discipleship, Version 2.0

The Rev. Sue Sommer

Crack open any commentary on the Gospel of John, turn to the section on today's passage, and you will likely find reference to it being a later addition. It's fascinating how Scriptural scholars can figure this out, using certain algorithms around sentence structure and word usage. The consensus seems to be that the initial ending in the gospel which we heard last week -- Thomas's confession of Jesus as "my Lord and my God" -- apparently left too many loose ends. What about the other disciples? What about Peter, for heavens' sake, who saw the empty tomb on Easter Sunday and went home and said nothing? Doesn't that sound more like a career-ending move? How did he wind up as Bishop of Rome? There had to have been more to the story.

But I have to tell you that, later addition or not, today's passage has always struck me as authentic -- maybe not its authorship, but certainly the experience it conveys. The disciples had seen the risen Christ. Jesus appeared to them, spoke with them. He was corporeal. His wounds were intact. And yet he was able to move through impediments like doors. Wow. Certainly we can believe that they didn't know what to do next. Resurrection was, after all unprecedented. But what they did know was what they had done prior to Jesus calling them to be his disciples in the first place. They knew how to fish. So of course they went fishing. That's what we do. OK, maybe not fishing per se, but when our world has been upended in some way, our first impulse often is to find some normalcy. We search for something familiar, maybe something that we have some expertise in.

And what I love about this account is how Jesus meets the disciples where they are -- madly scrambling to regain their equilibrium -- but doesn't let them stay there. What the Resurrected Lord needed them to do now was to lead. To proclaim the good news of the resurrection to the uttermost reaches of the earth. To make disciples. To be Christ's hands and feet in the world through a ministry of proclamation and healing, teaching and justice-making.

And the spotlight turned on Peter. Again, crack open any commentary on John, and you'll find much ado made about Jesus giving Peter a chance to affirm his love three times in order to rectify his three-fold denial of Jesus. That does fit a literary algorithm neatly, but in fact, Peter never denied Jesus. By which I mean, he never denied Jesus's identity. Never said, "Nope, he's not the Messiah, go ahead and crucify him." What Peter denied was his **own** discipleship. What Peter denied was his **own** identity and his calling. He did it 3 times there in courtyard of the high priest's house.

And there he was, doing it again, this time on a boat on the Sea of Galilee. "*Nope. I'm not a disciple. Nope, nothing disciple-ish about me at all... nope, nope.*" But Jesus won't give up on him. He comes at it again. He helps them haul in an amazing catch, and then gets down to brass tacks. *Peter, do you love me?* Again, the commentaries make much ado about the fact that Jesus uses a different word for love than Peter does when Peter replies. Jesus uses a variation on the word, "Agape," which is self-giving God-love. Peter replies with a variation on Phileos or "friendship, family love." Are we to assume that Jesus is in the friend zone? Is this another example of Peter's cluelessness? We don't know, but it is likely at least from the context that Peter is all too aware of how unGod-like his capacity for love has been and perhaps is, especially in comparison to that of Jesus. But notice what Jesus says each of the three times. *Feed my sheep.* The subtext is, "I have called you and there is ministry for you to do with whatever love you have within you for me."

We could argue that the Church was formed there at on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus, earlier, had said to his disciples that he no longer called them servants, but called them friends. Which is to say, Jesus embodied God's grace, and accepted them as they were for who they were.

There was nothing they had done or left undone that could change that free gift of grace. They belonged to God, marked as Christ's own forever. But it didn't end there with Peter, as spokesman, affirming his love for Jesus. Because of that gift of belonging, God would indeed find a way to use them to make a difference in the world. To feed the sheep and care for the lambs. Today, the Church uses the theological word, "vocation" to describe that sense of purpose to which we are called

That is the essence of baptism, my friends. It is the means of grace and the beginning of vocation as Christ's disciples. And like Peter and the other disciples, there are times when it all seems a bit much for us. When we feel so far out of our comfort zone that we are inclined to rely instead of what we think we know or are good at. Kind of, "Yes Lord, I love you...but...I'm overwhelmed. Got a lot on my plate. I'm confused. I'm fearful of making a mistake or appearing foolish or of getting hurt. So I'm just going to concentrate on work or school or my golf game or (fill in the blank)."

And sure enough. Christ meets us where we are. Builds a fire to warm us. Gives us some bread to eat – his own precious body, the bread of heaven. Loves us despite our own incapacity to love him as fully as he loves us. Reminds us of the gifts we have. And points us, again, toward those sheep.