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Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado
Easter 3, Series C
Saturday, May 4th, 2019
Sunday, May 5th, 2019

Sermon: Come and Get It!¹

Text: John 21:1-19

Focus: Jesus forgives our failures and calls us to kingdom service.

Function: That they would receive God's grace in Word and Sacrament and gladly serve him.

Structure: Story-Applied

Locus: "I believe that Jesus Christ... my Lord... has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person..." (SC, 2nd Article of Apostles' Creed).

Alleluia! Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed! Alleluia!* "I am going fishing" (John 21:3, ESV).² Not me! I went fishing yesterday and didn't catch a thing. GONE FISHING is what Peter said in our Gospel lesson. GONE FISHING! It's a cute sign when it's hanging from a store window. But Peter wasn't going on vacation or taking the day off. While waiting for Jesus to show up in Galilee, he had grown impatient. Days earlier, the crucified and risen Lord Jesus appeared to his disciples and proved he was alive.

But Peter didn't know what to do next. One minute, Jesus was dead. The next minute he was alive. The minute after that he was gone again. What's a disciple to do? So Peter did what any of us would do when we don't know what to do: he fell back on the familiar, returning to old habits and routines. Long before Jesus ever met Peter and called him to be a fisher of men, Peter had been an actual fisherman. Whenever he was confused, lonely, or afraid, there was nothing better to untangle his thoughts than to head out on the water. So Peter said, "I am going fishing."

¹ An earlier version of this sermon was originally preached on Sunday, April 13th, 2013, at Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado.

² All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

And six other disciples, including John (the disciple whom Jesus loved), all replied, “We will go with you.”

But they were unlucky in the effort. They stayed up all night fishing but didn’t catch anything. Suddenly, a stranger on the shore called out, “Children, do you have any fish?” We chuckle to ourselves. Of course, the disciples should’ve known it was Jesus, just a little late (or maybe right on time!). But who can blame them? It’s such a familiar scene: the landlubber on the shore calling out to the men in the boat, “Caught anything?” Jesus could’ve been anyone!

But Peter and his friends are tired, wet, and frustrated. So they simply say, “No.”

“Cast the net on the right side of the boat,” Jesus says, “and you will find some” (John 21:6).

They still didn’t know it was Jesus, but what harm could it do? They did as they were told, and the Lord blessed their obedience with an abundant catch. They caught so many fish, they could barely haul it in.

That’s when John exclaimed, “It is the Lord!” (How similar to Thomas’s confession, “My Lord and my God!” in John 20:28)

Peter was so excited that he couldn’t wait to get to shore. He just put on his clothes and jumped into the water. Don’t ask me the sense of getting dressed *before* jumping in for a swim! Maybe in his joy and excitement, Peter was half-crazy and didn’t know what he was doing. Or maybe Peter just didn’t want Jesus to see him half naked.

Peter swam to shore, and the others came by boat. When they got to shore, they saw that Jesus had already laid a fire for them with fish and biscuits baking.

“Come and have breakfast,” Jesus said (John 21:12). It was a joyful invitation, but it was more than a request. “Come” is the language of discipleship. It’s the same word Jesus spoke

three years earlier: “Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19, CSM). “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). “Come, you who are blessed by my Father...” (Matt. 25:34). “He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay” (Matt. 28:6). “Come and have breakfast” (John 21:12).

Jesus’ disciples needed a renewal of their calling. For in the Garden of Gethsemane, they abandoned Jesus on the night of his arrest. Yes, Judas betrayed him, but the rest of them fled. At the high priest’s house Peter even *denied* Jesus.

“You also are one of his disciples, are you not?”

“I am not,” Peter replied, not once, but *three times* before the rooster crowed (John 18:25). Peter denied Jesus. He gave up on him.

Only John and the women remained at the cross. The rest of them all fall away. They gave up on Jesus. They abandoned the faith. They stopped being his disciples. And so they needed to hear his gracious call again.

“Come and have breakfast,” Jesus said.

But this is also table talk—the language of fellowship. “Come and get it!” “Breakfast is served.” Loaves and fishes for the disciples of Jesus. Jesus dines with his disciples and shares a meal with them. It implied full acceptance. And so by making breakfast, Jesus forgave his disciples for all their sins of abandonment, denial, and unbelief. He welcomed them back into his fellowship and closed the circle.

But one disciple was a special case (maybe even a “hard case”?). Of course, I’m talking about Peter! Three times Jesus asked Peter if he loved him, to counteract Peter’s three denials at Jesus’ trial. Three times Peter answered, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” And three times Jesus made everything better when he commanded, “Feed my lambs” (John 21:15), “Tend

my sheep” (John 21:16), and “Feed my sheep” (John 21:17). All was not lost! *Peter* was not lost! Jesus forgave him. He was still Peter, and on that rock Jesus could and would still build *his* Church (cp. Matt. 16:18). And so he bid Peter, “Follow me” (John 21:19).

Today’s Gospel reading from John 21 is often regarded by Bible scholars as an epilogue or afterword, a kind of tacked-on ending to an otherwise complete Gospel. What are we to make of breakfast on the beach and Jesus’ reinstatement of Peter? What does it have to do with us?

Well, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, this passage has everything to do with us. At times we too feel lost, without direction or purpose in life. Where are we going? What are we supposed to be doing? Where’s God in all this? And when is *Jesus* going to show up?

So when we don’t know what to do, we often fall back on what is familiar and do what we used to do. We go back to old habits and routines, relying on old coping mechanisms, addictions, or dysfunctional relationships just to get through. We may even scratch at old wounds just to see if they still hurt and bleed.

But where has that gotten us? How’s that working out for you? “Have you caught any fish?” Did you find what you were looking for? No, probably not.

And so Jesus calls out, “Cast your nets on the right side!” Listen to *me*! Do things *my* way! Believe my Word and obey my Commandments. And when we do, we are overwhelmed by abundant blessing. As Jesus says, “Blessed... are those who hear the Word of God and keep it” (Luke 11:28).

And then the Lord beckons us to “come and eat.” Now I am willing to bet that you already ate breakfast this morning. But what about supper—the *Lord’s* Supper, his Holy Communion? “Come and get it!” “Take and eat!” “Take and drink!” “This bread is my body.”

“This wine is my blood.” It’s all for you—for your forgiveness (cp. Matt. 26:26-28). He is creator, caller, chef, and host all rolled into one! “It is the Lord,” as only the Lord Jesus can be, fully present by his Spirit, in his Word, and under bread and wine. Jesus forgives our sins and welcomes us back into fellowship as he dines with his disciples—whenever we dine upon his body and blood.

But then, like Simon Peter, some of us are special cases (maybe even hard cases). Like Peter, we have denied Jesus. We have sinned against him “in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone” (*LSB*). And so, by word and deed, we have denied Christ. “Actions speak louder than words.” And sinful acts say one thing only: “I do not know him!” “I am *not* his disciple!” “I do not know the man!” *Cock-a-doodle-doo!*

Then Jesus turns to us and asks, “Do you love me?”

We look away, a little embarrassed. “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.”

“Then feed my lambs.” That’s not what we expected to hear. You mean Jesus still wants us on his team?

“Do you love me?” Jesus asks again.

It hurts even more this time. We hang our heads in shame.

“Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.”

“Then shepherd my sheep.” It’s really true! Jesus hasn’t rejected us. He still has some use for us—a job and a purpose—even after everything we’ve done wrong.

But then Jesus asks, “Are we still friends? Do you even like me?”

And maybe we are saddened that Jesus asks us a third time if we love him—if we are even his friends. But can you blame him? He needs to be sure. Are we really his disciples?

“Feed my sheep,” Jesus says. And bring back the ones who are lost (Luke 15:1-10).

This is a strange kind of forgiveness; it doesn't sound anything like the crystal-clear words of absolution we are used to hearing. But it's still forgiveness. Jesus' Word of welcome and grace fills us and frees us and sends us out. "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you" (John 20:21). And then, at the last, "Follow me" (John 21:19). These are the words of call and commission. These are the words of discipleship! These are the words Jesus speaks to the ones he loves and cleans by his blood so we can answer the call.

"Come..." "Eat..." "Follow me..." These are the words we need to hear, believe, and obey. In Jesus' name. Amen. Alleluia! Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed!* Alleluia! Amen.