**I am Going Fishing**

Micah 6:6-8

John 21:1-19

I must confess that I was a bit relieved when I first read the assigned lectionary text for this Sunday. Last fall when I told Rev. Glen Herrington-Hall about my intention to retire shortly after Easter, Glen remarked, “great timing, you can read the resurrection story that concludes “they all fled and said nothing”. It would certainly be in context of the Minnesota culture with which I grew up if the morning simply ended with something like “Yup, that’s it then”. Or, “OK. See you.”

Fortunately for me our Gospel lesson today is a celebratory text with Chef Jesus cooking up a nice meal on the beach for the disciples. But, what I really like about this passage is that Peter provides an answer to a question that I have been asked a lot in the past several months, “What are you going to do next?” Peter’s response sounds good to me. “I’m going fishing.” As soon as I saw that line, I knew I had my sermon title. I didn’t have a sermon, but I had a sermon title. In a way you could say, I began fishing with this sermon as I cast about for a message. Some of you may end up thinking, well you should have thrown that one back, but I am trusting on this last Sunday, you will be extra nice about whatever we find at the end of the line, even if does look to you like an old shoe.

The Gospel of John is the oldest of the Gospels, written some 60 – 70 years after Jesus was executed. It is beginning to dawn on folks that there will be no quick, dramatic change in the world. Rome is still in power. Patriarchy, injustice, violence all seem firmly in place. If change is going to come, if God’s Realm of justice and love is to be realized in this world, they will have to be in it for the long haul.

Biblical commentators generally consider this last chapter of John with the story of Jesus frying up some fish for the disciples to be a curtain call. The Gospel has ended with the last verse of the previous chapter 20, “these things are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and through believing you may have life.” Down goes the curtain. But, the people refuse to leave. They sit there waiting, expecting more. Up comes the curtain, and there stands Peter, along with the other disciples. The Gospel of John and this passage in particular is about addressing the counter cultural question, “what does it mean for a congregation, a community of faith, for all of us to be in it not just for the short run, but to see ourselves in Kairos time, God’s times as part of the movement of God’s justice and love”.

It has been an amazing and head spinning period of time for Peter and all of the disciples. They had tried dissuading Jesus from making that last trip to Jerusalem. They knew the risks were high, but Jesus insisted love, including standing with and for the oppressed, requires nothing less than complete faithfulness. In a matter of days, Jesus is arrested, tried and executed. A few days later they start hearing rumors that what they thought was the end of the story, was anything but. Apparently, there is more yet to come and Christ has been popping up in the most unexpected places to reinforce the promise that the movement of God’s love and justice continues, stronger than ever. It is no easier for Peter or the disciple to take this long range, God’s time perspective on our world and our lives than it is for us.

As most of you know, I came to Cherokee Park United Church in 1981. Just to put that in perspective, last Sunday after church, Greta and Natasha Lipetzky came into my study for a little visit. They asked how long I had been here. I said, “35 years”. They said “our mom and dad are 39”. I said, “do you know how old your parents were when I started here?” We did the math. They seemed a little stunned. I asked, a question, I should know better than to ask, “Do you think I am old?” To which I received a definite “yes”.

We live by the calendar, measuring the years, the months, the weeks, the days, the hours. Folks planning our gathering after worship tried to give you some idea of how long things will last because they know you likely have other things on your calendar, plans that you have made, things you want to get done.

I can assure you that when I came to Cherokee I had no plans to stay 35 years. After I had been here for awhile, one of the members shared with me that part of the reason they called me as pastor is because they knew that in addition to my Master of Divinity degree I had a Master of Social Work degree. The congregation wasn’t sure it would be able to continue paying a full time pastor and hoped if needed I would be willing to go part time and use my MSW to find another part time job. My MSW was sort of their safety net. I never told them that my MSW was my safety net as well. I definitely came thinking if this doesn’t work out, I have other options.

We make our plans. We come up with our contingencies, but none of us knows how life is going to unfold. Although, it is not recorded, we can easily imagine one of the disciples, saying to Peter, “what are you going to do next Peter?” To which Peter replies, “I am going fishing.”

That was a good choice for Peter. Jesus had been teaching and modeling for them the importance of prayer, quiet and meditation. The problem for Peter is he kept dozing off. According to Luke, Peter almost missed the transfiguration of Jesus because he was getting drowsy. He did fall asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane as Jesus prayed. Once or twice he tried that excuse that I have heard from time to time, “I only close my eyes Jesus because that way I can listen better.” How then do you explain your head bobbing Peter?

Peter was one of those folks who found it easiest to meditate, easiest to pray when he was doing something familiar that he could do without thinking. Fishing fit the bill. When Peter was fishing he could let go of all that chatter in his brain about all that had happened in the past. When Peter was fishing he could let go of all his anxieties and worries about the future. More than anything, fishing enabled Peter to be in the present, be in the moment, the here and now.

In his book Living Buddha, Living Christ, Thich Nhat Hanh refers to this notion of being in the moment, intentionally seeking to live in the present as the practice of mindfulness. “Most of the time,” says Hanh, “we’re lost in the past or carried away by future projects and concerns. When we are mindful, touching deeply the present moment, we can see and listen deeply, and the fruits are always understanding, acceptance, love and the desire to relieve suffering and bring joy.” He goes on to say, “To me, mindfulness is very much like the Holy Spirit. Both are agents of healing….When you touch deep understanding and love you are healed.”

What are you going to do next Peter? “I am going fishing.” That is Peter’s way of living in the moment. Maybe you are a lot better at quiet meditation and prayer than Peter. Or maybe you have found some other way of being liberated from what has been and set free from worries of what might be. I mentioned a few weeks ago that one of our former members practiced mindfulness, found it easiest to pray when she was cleaning.

The irony is, it is when we are most fully open to the present, practicing mindfulness, that our hearts are most receptive to the Kairos time, the in it for the long haul movement of God’s love and justice time. We set down our I-phones, our cell phones, turn off the TV, cease planning the next day’s activities, quit rehearsing yesterday’s events, feel the breeze on our face, know our connection to the world around us, allow ourselves to be truly touched by the plight of refugees, immigrants and all who suffer, truly listen and care for each other. It is when we allow ourselves to be in the moment, to be fully present that we are most receptive to the presence of the Risen Christ, the one who invites us to live as participants in God’s movement of love and justice, not by our time and on our schedule and by our calendar, but by the unfolding of God’s time.

When Peter signed on with Jesus he had no idea what the future would hold. None of us do. When I came to Cherokee Park United Church, I would never have imagined that I would still be here in 2016.

Helma Rogers, Diane Spicer, Ted Abdella, Bob Lockwood soon joined by Jill Jackson and Jan Howe have been present for all or most those years I doubt any of us would have fully imagined some of the many changes that have unfolded. At times it was a bit of a roller coaster. Some people like roller coasters. We make our plans as best we can. We live by our calendar, but the time that nourishes us, the time that strengthens us, the time that sustains us is God’s time, only known in the here and now.

John has finished his story. The Gospel is ended, but the people are still there wanting more. The curtain comes back up. There stands Peter and the disciples, “What are you going to do next Peter?” “I am going fishing”. Before the story is done, we are reminded that in God’s time, the nets are unable to contain the abundance of all God provides. There is no need for walls to keep folks out. There is enough for all. In this curtain call of John’s Gospel we are reminded that when we come together in community living in the here and now of God’s time we are nourished and fed by the One for whom love is stronger than death.

The curtain is about to come back down on this little curtain call to John’s Gospel when we hear Jesus ask the question to Peter that has haunted the church ever since? “Do you love me”? “Yes, Lord”. “Feed by sheep”. “Do you love me”? “Yes, Lord”. “Feed my lambs”. “Do you love me”? “Yes, Lord”. “Feed by sheep”.

It was many, many years earlier when a prophet, living in God’s time, said clearly and without hesitation what it means to feed God’s sheep. “God has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”  I came to Cherokee Park United Church believing this is who and what the church is called to be. I believe it still.

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to have been your pastor, those here today and those who have gone before. I have treasured your love and prayers and will continue to do so, just as you have my love and my prayers.

What am I going to do next? Peter sets a good example.

**Micah 6:6-8**

*Prophets are prophet because they focus like a lazar on the heart of whatever issue is before them. In our first lesson the prophet Micah addresses the age old temptation of treating worship as spiritual engagement separate from who we are as a people, how we live with each other and with the earth. The prophet says the worship that matters most to God is our faithfulness to God’s ways.*

6 ‘With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high?  
Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves a year old?  7 Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with tens of thousands of rivers of oil?  
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?’ 8 He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

**John 21:1-19**

*Our second lesson comes at the end of John’s Gospel. Scholars generally believe it was a later addition. It is the final resurrection appearance of Jesus recorded by John. By this time the disciples have already experienced the risen Christ, but they remain confused and unsure of what it all means. The story of this final encounter with Christ occurs where for several of them, including Peter; they encountered Jesus for the first time.*

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. 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. 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.  
  
Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." 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. 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 sea. 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.  
  
When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. 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. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.  
  
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." 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." 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. 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." (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."