

Sermon 2010 Easter 3

Text: John 21:1-14

Theme: "Opened Eyes See Jesus"

All of us have times when we feel as though we are going it alone. We think that no one has ever felt the way we feel. No one understands what we meant or how we struggle. People, even friends, look in from the outside and try to offer advice and help for our difficult situation and all it feels like is criticism. Sometimes we lash out at those who try to help us. Sometimes we nod and smile but suffer in silence.

The reality is that when we are in those situations that make us feel alone and helpless, we don't know what to do. We feel as though we are in quicksand. The more we struggle, the deeper we sink. Finally we become so overwhelmed that we wall ourselves into our tomb, close our eyes and sit and breathe our poisoned air. Eventually people stop sending in aid that is only rebuffed and we fulfill our own prophesy – because people have given up trying to help, we decide that indeed we were right, no one cares and no one is there.

I think that is how the disciples felt that week after the Lord's death and resurrection. They had a resurrected Lord and they had all seen him. He had been to see them in the upper room twice, but they did not know what to do with a resurrected Lord. For 4 years they had followed Jesus and he had been with them day in and day out. They had lived together, eaten together and he had taught them many things, performed miracles in their sight and even empowered them to do the miraculous themselves. But in the end, Judas had betrayed him, Peter denied him and he had been taken from them. Now he was resurrected from the dead, but it was not the same. Like friends who move away, we always say we will stay as close as ever but it is rare when that happens after a few years right? Relationships are hard to maintain when people are not together.

So they were despondent and Peter decided to do what he knew: fish. When we feel like the world is turning to jell-o beneath our feet, we search out that which we know and can find comfort in. But even fishing did not go well – nothing – all night.

When you are in that situation – alone, forlorn, feeling uncertain and afraid; does it help to know that there is a God in heaven watching you struggle? Does it help to know that he is allowing you to go through this for your own good? Did it help when your parents told you that this is hurting them more than it hurts you? A wispy, ethereal God does not make me feel better. Knowing that eventually the pain will end and I will be free is a good thing but it does not really help right now. When my back hurts, knowing that pain cannot go on forever does nothing to mitigate the pain right now. On the other hand, ice packs, heating pads and pain killers do wonders RIGHT NOW! When I am in pain, I want something I can touch.

It is like the little girl who was afraid of the thunderstorm. Her mom said don't worry, God is with you. And she said that's nice, you stay here with God but I'm going to sleep with Daddy.

The doctrine at issue here is the two natures of Christ. The resurrection proved to the disciples that Jesus was fully and completely divine. Only God can rise from the dead. Only God has power over the grave. When Jesus walked out of that tomb, he proved conclusively that he was fully and completely God.

If that had been all that he wanted to prove, he could have ascended into heaven that moment and been done with it. He did not need to hang around for 40 days and appear to his followers several times. But he did. He did because he also wanted to prove that he was STILL fully and completely human. He allowed Thomas to touch his hands and his side where he had been wounded. Thomas touched a real human being and by his touch Thomas' eyes were opened. He looked at Jesus and said "My Lord and my God!"

And here, in our Gospel for today he does a number of human things to open the eyes of the rest of the disciples.

First he is concerned about the petty and mundane issues of his children. They are upset and they have been fishing all night and caught nothing. Like a compassionate older brother, Jesus fixes it for them. He calls out to them from shore. Let down your nets on the other side. Of course there is a miraculous catch of fish and John and Peter, Jesus' closest friends recognize him and Peter swims for shore.

That is important. The Lord understands our human emotions because he is fully human still. He rose from the dead fully God but still fully human as well. We tend to forget that. We spiritualize Jesus to the point that he is something other than us but he is just like us, except with no sin – uncorrupted.

Next Jesus does my favorite thing. He eats. All through the Gospels Jesus sits and eats with his apostles and he is no different in his resurrected body. He does something as simple as build a fire and he cooks some fish for them and eats breakfast with them. You think Jesus does not understand our problems? He does. He is real. And like that day on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, Jesus calls to us today and opens our eyes so we see the complete Jesus: completely human and completely God.

First he speaks to us through his word. All of our difficulties are solved when we listen carefully to his word. Stop trying to bend his word around to fit what you think is true and instead listen to his word for truth and bend your lives around to fit him. The answers are there for you and if your eyes are opened, you will see them. You may not like them and they will not conform to your human nature but they will transform your life.

Second, he is physically present again with us today. He invites us forward in just a moment to dine with him and on him as he gives us not fish for our bodies but body and blood for our souls to strengthen and sustain us in this journey we are making with him to the Promised Land. Jesus never left. He ascended bodily into heaven but as God fills all space so Jesus fills all space, truly human and truly God. He even fills our space with his body and blood. How much more real could our God be? Look! It is the Lord. We are not alone. We see Jesus. AMEN.