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**Faith and Fishing**

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Dr. Alfred Jones was a quiet man of science who enjoyed fishing and working as a civil engineer in England when we met him in the bestselling book that was made into a delightful movie in 2012 called *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen*. Yet it wasn't long before Dr. Jones discovered there was something more to life, something he'd been missing even though it looked like he had everything a person could want: a job, a wife, a hobby. It all started with an email from a financial firm inviting him to participate in the impossible sounding project of bringing the sport of salmon fishing to the Yemen. Like all men of faith before him (though he didn't know he was a man of faith yet); Dr. Jones said no to the holy invitation; not once but repeatedly. It was, he maintained, totally impossible.

However, after meeting the man behind the incredible vision, a sheik with deep faith, Dr. Jones began to change. The sheik was a young man who shared the doctor's love of fishing, however to the sheik fishing was one way to live out his faith as it taught the valuable lessons of patience, perseverance, the art of paying attention, and hope that is required in both faith and fishing. The more time Dr. Jones spent with the sheik, the more intrigued he became and by following the sheik to Yemen to see the possibilities for himself, Dr. Jones embraced more than just the sheik's vision for the possibility of creating rivers of cold water for salmon to swim in. He began to live as one who has faith; and at the end of the story, we see Dr. Jones let go of all the security and comfort he thought he had and step into a life that embraced living for something more than just himself. For it seems, at least in this story, faith and fishing do go hand in hand.

Which brings me to our Gospel reading today; which seems to me to also be about fishing and faith. Many scholars and commentators are quick to remind us that the words we just heard in John's Gospel are quite certainly not written by the same author who wrote the preceding chapters of John's Gospel. This chapter, often called an epilogue, seems to be like the bonus material on a Blue Ray or DVD. Some commentators and scholars feel this story was a reflection for the community of believers that had formed around John and were now starting

to work with other communities of believers. And that may be the case, no one really knows for sure. But while many see the work of an imposter, there are many more who love the story of the disciples who don't seem to know what to do now that Jesus is risen and they have seen and experienced this risen Jesus for themselves. Maybe this is a story for anyone who wonders what do after the joyful celebration of Easter, and what it means that Jesus is risen, not only for Jesus, but for us.

We know the story begins with Peter making the executive decision to go fishing. The reason for going fishing is not stated. Maybe he was bored. Maybe he didn't know what to do so he did what he knew. Remember, Peter and a few other disciples were fishermen. Peter didn't fish like Dr. Jones, it wasn't a pleasant hobby connected to his means of income. For Peter, before Jesus called him to follow him, fishing was his life. Fishing is what he did, what he grew up around, how he provided for his family, what he would have trained the next generation to do. So even though Peter had seen Jesus raised from the dead, even though Jesus had breathed the Holy Spirit onto Peter, that didn't mean Peter knew what to do after that. In a lot of ways it makes sense that when we don't know what to do, we can do something we know. At least as a place to start.

And we know it was a fruitless endeavor. There were no fish caught. That the disciples went fishing at night was not the problem, according to those who know that was the time to go fishing. Sometimes it happens that way, even the professionals come up empty now and then.

But then it was daybreak. And Jesus was on the beach and like all the encounters with the Risen Jesus, no one recognized him at first. Not until he told the disciples to cast their nets. Was it the instruction he gave or the many fish that made the one called the Beloved Disciple recognize Jesus? We aren't told. Just that it wasn't until after the net was full that Jesus was recognized.

Perhaps it reminded the disciples of the times Jesus fed the multitudes, of the ways Jesus showed abundance in the face of scarcity and fear. I believe it is important that the disciples didn't attribute their big catch to their skills. Peter didn't say, "I've still got it!" The change in their luck wasn't for any other reason than they listened to Jesus. Peter seemed so excited that Jesus was there he abandoned the fish, the boat, and the others, even though it was his idea to go fishing in the first place.

And after everyone got to shore they discovered a fire with fish roasting and bread warming and even though Jesus had enough for them, he still asked for some of the fish they had caught to add to the meal. Yet again we see Jesus providing, Jesus feeding, and using what everyone has to contribute.

Then there was the exchange between Peter and Jesus; asking and answering and commissioning. While some feel this is Jesus forgiving Peter for his three denials and restoring Peter to the community, perhaps it is Jesus' way of helping Peter and the disciples transition from seeing and experiencing the Risen Jesus to living as followers and believers not only of Jesus but the Risen Jesus. To follow the Risen Jesus means the story doesn't end at the cross and the tomb. Those who follow the Risen Jesus have seen that fear and power do not get the last say; God will have the last say, not just in some things, but in all things. And God's Word isn't going to be anger or fear or power expressed in ways that hurt, God's Word is forgiveness and peace and hope. God's Word will remove power from the powerful and end senseless violence.

And while all that is beautiful to think about, it still might make us wonder what that means for us, just as it might have made Peter wonder: so what now?

Jesus reminded Peter, it comes back to Jesus: asking Peter if he loved him, and commissioning him to care for his sheep and lambs, his community and to follow him.

Peter's wonderment might still be alive today. Now that the day of Easter is behind us, now that we have a season of Easter, we might wonder so what? There is a semester drawing near its end, another summer quickly approaching, and things we need to do. We might feel we need to be more like the character of Dr. Jones and keep our noses to those grindstones, because that resurrection stuff doesn't really affect us on a daily basis, right?

Perhaps the reason this story was added to the Gospel is because wondering how to live after Jesus's Resurrection is something a lot of Christians have always wondered about.

The answer we receive today is not explicit. It doesn't come with details or an instruction book. What we can see in this story is to listen to Jesus, especially when we might be feeling whatever scarcity feels like for us. When it seems we are failing in our endeavors, we can be challenged to listen for Jesus, through

prayer or counsel, even if what we hear sounds impossible or improbable. Perhaps it means looking for and being open to the possible in situations that seem otherwise.

For the sheik in the story Salmon Fishing in the Yemen, it was through fishing that he found that type of prayer where he was open to hearing God, and that is why he wanted to bring fishing to his people. We might not all be fishermen like the sheik and Dr. Jones and Peter and the disciples, but we might have other activities that are that type of faith-building prayer for us: hiking or walking, painting or gardening.

Following the Risen Jesus is listening, and, at least it seems in this story, eating. Taking the time to nourish our bodies so that we can feed others. In a parish that takes this commission so passionately to heart, we might want to reflect on ways we allow Jesus to feed us and how we feed not only ourselves but our community. When the OU food truck started parking next to our building, I remember hearing words of worry that students and the community members who eat lunch here on Wednesdays might choose the food truck and we'd see a decline in participation. But instead we have seen an increase in participation; in fact more people are finding out about our free lunch and several of the new people who've been coming to lunch tell me they are finding more than just free food here: they are finding a welcome that is rare. And while that might seem a small thing, perhaps in light of the resurrection is really is something important; a way of showing God's Word Present. That is living faith.

A faith that we can live, as the sheik showed Dr. Jones and Jesus showed Peter, by allowing ourselves to be nourished by God's Love, so that we too can listen, and live, and by so doing may effectively nourish and inspire those around us.