

## May 4<sup>th</sup> message

Many times I look at the scripture for the time of year and think to myself, “What can I possibly share that I haven’t before? But then in my study I learn something I hadn’t thought of before. And I think to myself, ‘You can teach an old dog some new tricks.’

Chapter 20 ends with the words found in verses 30 and 31: Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. Some Bibles even have a heading for those two verses that says: *The Purpose of John’s Gospel*.

Those two verses seem a perfect conclusion to John’s gospel. The gospel of Matthew goes from the guards being bribed about the empty tomb to the great commission on a mountain. The gospel of Mark has Jesus taken up into heaven sitting on the right hand of the Father and the disciples going forth to preach. And the gospel of Luke has the account of the actual accession.

To many this last chapter of John seemed out of place. Why have this incident after what seems to be a good ending? Well in my study, one thought I learned was that John needed to lay to rest the rumors that the appearances of the Risen Christ were nothing more than visions the disciples had had. Some people at the time even went so far as to say they were hallucinations. Even though the gospels told how Jesus was real with the marks in his hands and side that was not enough.

So Bible scholars feel John needed to relate this story making several points. First of all only a real person would be able to spot a shoal of fish, next only a living person would be able to make a fire, cook a meal, eat it and share it.

Perhaps only then John could close his gospel with verse 25 in chapter 21. “Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.”

No doubt those first disciples who gathered that day were feeling quite guilty. After all they had abandoned Jesus and all; especially Peter was especially depressed after boasting about his undying loyalty. Peter may have even been thinking, what possible use would Jesus want with him now? So he decides to go back to something he knew and understood: fishing.

Perhaps we can relate, if something new doesn't work out we can be tempted to return to something familiar. I have known different folks who have moved from job to job only to go back to one they realized they were the best suited for. In this case maybe Peter is thinking of turning back from the new life God has called him to. Yet Jesus has other plans. After going all night catching nothing, a stranger from the shore has a new approach for them. And of course they remember how Jesus first called them.

While we may not have abandoned Christ like those first disciples we probably would have. Things had turned against them and they were afraid for their lives. If we look at our own lives and are honest we can see how in many ways left Jesus out. Not of fear, but because we have different priorities that don't include following the Lord as closely as we should. Yet, Jesus calls us back and asks us point blank, do you love me? That's the question we all must be ready for. Maybe we've never really thought about it before, but we should and how we would respond. If our answer is yes, I'm guessing we would be told to feed my sheep, just like Peter.

I read a story this week about a pastor took his family to Scotland. This pastor had a daughter with two requests for the trip: She wanted to play golf and she wanted to cuddle sheep. Early in the trip, they arrived on the Isle of Iona, off the west coast of Scotland. When they reached the lobby of the St. Columba Hotel, the pastor asked the receptionist about golf. The man at the desk said, "We have an 18-hole course on Iona. Balls and clubs are available here in the hotel, free of charge. There are no fees for the golf course, but I have to warn you — the groundskeepers are sheep and cows. The course is maintained by farm animals that graze on it all day. They also fertilize it."

Now I had to check that story out and I found there really is an island named Iona and the golf stuff is true. Now I know we don't have a lot of golfers here, but I think you can see a few problems here. First of all, if I was to play there I know I would either step in the natural fertilizer or my ball would stop in it. So I wonder if they follow the rule, play it where it lies. Second of all, I'm sure I hit a cow or sheep in the head and kill it. And finally I'm not really sure how much the daughter would be able to cuddle some sheep roaming wild like that.

After breakfast, Jesus asks Simon Peter three times about his love for Him. Peter responds affirmatively and each response has a reference to sheep. Jesus wants to emphasize love for him is not expressed by sitting around and thinking about how great Jesus is. Instead, love is expressed by actions that feed and care for others — people that Jesus describes as “my lambs and sheep.”

No doubt Peter feels hurt because Jesus asks him the third time, “Do you love me?” Jesus doesn't do anything to make him feel more guilty or ashamed; he doesn't throw Peter's mistakes in his face; he doesn't remind him of his failures. He simply states what Peter needs to do. With these words, Jesus puts him back on the right path.

That is the same call for us today, as we seek to follow Jesus. As followers of Christ, we are challenged to show our love for Jesus by caring for his people in the world. Often the task looks so overwhelming we forget that we are not on our own. In this reading, Jesus gives the disciples the instructions they need in order to pull in a net full of fish, and then he cooks them breakfast on the beach. Jesus is there and nourishes them. He does the same for us, so that we can be successful as we feed, tend and care for his lambs. We need to remember these two verses, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them,” and “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

As we all know there are many different ways to tend to feed and care for others. This body of Christ supports many missions near and far. We have made giving to our local food pantries a top priority. Many of us do much to benefit

others in the groups we belong to and in the volunteer work we do. These are all good.

Our biggest challenge as I see it is the influence of our culture on what Jesus teaches. We live in a time where there is less and less love for one's neighbor. If we love Jesus we called to love one another. We need to go to the Lord often in prayer as we navigate through these times. Let us always remember how God is with us and will provide guidance. Amen.