

Easter C-3
2019

On Holy Thursday we commemorate the “Last Supper” of Jesus together with the disciples. But the actual last meal of Jesus, the last earthly meal, takes place as it is related in today’s gospel. On the shore of Lake Tiberias Jesus prepares an early dawn meal for his friends.

The disciples had gone fishing: perhaps wishfully trying to restore normalcy to their lives; regardless, the fishing trip proved a failure: no catches.

They recognize it is Jesus on the shore – and he suggests they are fishing on the wrong side of the boat and that they cast their net off the starboard side – and as we hear, they net such a huge catch of fish it almost sinks their small boat – 153 of them.

Then Jesus prepares and shares a meal with them: bread and fish, recalling that earlier miraculous meal that fed the crowds.

Not only might the food itself jog their memories – so consider the setting. The last time Peter stood by a charcoal fire was the night he betrayed Jesus three times. And so Jesus asks, three times, “Peter, do you love me?”

It is notable that Jesus does not remind Peter of his past; he does not ask for or demand an apology; Jesus does not shame Peter. On the contrary: Jesus entrusts to Peter a mission and Peter learns what divine forgiveness is about: feed and tend the sheep.

Until this moment Peter could never carry out this mission until he had known his own brokenness and frailty, wept over what had been done, and stood again to regain himself in the light of the dawn, drawn into this new Easter reality of abundant life and light. It is then that he grasps what it means to love as Jesus loves.

This gospel passage is a story of restoration and transformation, re-creation. Perhaps we are reminded of moments when we rediscover and reclaim our true self, our best self, and our loving self?

This entire gospel story is about the awakening of Easter possibilities.

So we can consider another image, that of the disciples fishing through the night and the subsequent miraculous catch of fish. This part of the story also is about divine abundance, unearned, given graciously.

In Luke’s gospel this miraculous catch of fish takes place early on at the calling of the apostles: Jesus tells Simon to “go out into the deep and cast the net.” When we are tired, or spent, or disheartened, whatever human enterprise we are engaged in: we can hear these words: do not stay in the shallows, venture out into what is deep, and there you will find the abundance of God.

In July in Chicago we will observe 50 years of daring to seek the depths and casting our nets – and know the harvest of committed love, of friendships, of shared witness and service, of laboring for justice, and the blessings of this table. We have much work yet to do as a community of faith, welcome, and witness – here in our commonwealth, in our church and across our globe. Marriage equality is the law of the land, yet here in our nation, the challenges are as timely as ever.

On vacation in Hawaii a couple of years ago I ventured to the beach. I just wanted to plunge into the ocean – kind of a primal thing. We chose our favorite beach – but the surf was up and we didn't wade in too far. I waited for a wave and dove into it and immediately got tumbled and tossed around under the water. Maybe we should have chosen a calmer beach.

The droplets of Easter water we feel on our face during the sprinkling rite remind us that we will get tossed around and turned upside down sometimes in living out our baptismal calling. Baptismal waters can be rough. Take it from the apostles who, faithful to their task, refused to stop proclaiming Jesus as Risen and glorified. Not even a flogging would stop them, as they staked their lives on this promise and would go to their deaths as it's messengers. Such witness is the clearest and most compelling evidence the Scriptures offer for the resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus understands the demands of living the gospel faithfully and authentically. We get weary. We need sustenance and companionship, and so we come here, to be fed. So with clear Eucharistic overtones, Jesus feeds the disciples – and then asks that they now go and feed the sheep, for that which we receive, we give as a gift.