

3 EASTER APRIL 18, 2010 CYCLE "C"

Title: It's no breakfast at Tiffanys. But a love story for the ages.

Readings: Acts 9:1-6 [7-20], Ps. 30, Rev. 5:11-14, John 21:1-19

I was talking with Wade Fink the other day about fishing. I had the same conversation with Kim Isakson. Both told me that they had been out fishing all day and didn't get a single bite. It seems that has been the trend all this spring, lots of fishermen, lots of fishing, but few fish. I know I didn't have to ask Wade and Kim if they knew what Peter, John and the other disciples felt like for they, too, had been out all-night and had caught nothing. It reminds me of the story about a man who was driving along a country road and he saw another man fishing in a small stream. He stopped and watched him for a while. Then he called out to him, "Say buddy, are there any fish in that stream?" "No", the man called back. "Then why are you fishing it?" he asked. And the fisherman said, "So my wife knows I'm too busy to peel potatoes." So here we see Peter and the other disciples heading for shore exhausted, their all night fishing efforts fruitless, or rather fishless.

But there standing on the shore is a man who calls out to them, "Throw your net on the other side of the boat." Oh, well, one more cast wouldn't hurt. They do and it's so stuffed with fish that they can't even haul it in. It is now that John recognized Jesus. "It is the Lord," he shouts and there goes impulsive Peter so excited that he dives into the water and races to shore. How much awe those disciples must have experienced as they gather around Jesus, living, breathing, risen. He had even prepared a charcoal fire to roast some of the fish and prepared bread as well. As their eyes were opened and they recognized their risen Lord, they sat and breakfasted with him.

So what is John trying to tell us? He wants us to know that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is raised, he is alive! This is his third appearance, it is not some vision or magic, this is real. We recognize him if we open our

eyes in faith, see him and believe. His risen body is special says John. He walks through locked doors, but he also does ordinary things, he sees with his eyes, he speaks to us, he prepares food and eats with us. John wants us to know that he is alive, not because the tomb is empty, but because of his appearances in the flesh. We have seen him they testify, we have talked with him, we have eaten with him. Jesus has conquered death. That's the good news of Easter!

But it is even more than about resurrection. It is about love. God's love for us. His gracious sacrificial love for us expressed so magnificently in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And John wants us to know today that it is very special for Peter. It is really hard to miss the symbolism as Jesus asks Peter not once, but three times if he loves him more than these. Peter who had denied him three times. As we see Peter answer Jesus those three times, we see in this encounter Peter's understanding of his Lord move from his head to his heart, from an intellectual knowledge to an experiential knowledge.

Biblical scholars tell us that the first two times that Jesus asks, "Peter, do you love me?" Jesus uses the word *agape*, that is God-like love. But the third time Jesus asks the question, he uses the verb *phileo* or brotherly love. Peter replies each time with the verb *phileo* (brotherly love). Surely Christ knew that this was Simon Peter he was talking to. Simon was a fallible man, just as we are fallible people. Was he capable of God-like love? Are any of us? Certainly he could strive for it. That's all Christ asks from any of us, that we strive for *agape*, god-like love. Then when we arrive at *phileo*, brotherly love, it will be genuine.

But we should not miss this: Christ says to Simon Peter, "If you love Me, then feed My sheep." The point is the best way to love Christ is to love his sheep. He doesn't want burnt offerings or long, flowery verbose prayers, or painfully pious expressions. He just wants love! Love is the authentic sign of discipleship. Love for others is the real symbol of our love for Christ. He wants us to follow Him and imitate His loving ways. He wants us to understand that love is the most powerful thing in the world. He wants us to know that love makes all the difference.

Helen Steiner Rice, the noted poet put it into poetry. This is what she said:

“The priceless gift of life is love,
For with the help of God above,
Love can change the human race
And make this world a better place.
For love dissolves all hate and fear
And makes our vision bright and clear.
So we can see and rise above
Our pettiness on wings of love.”

Let us love with God-like love, reach out in true discipleship, and carry out the command of our risen Lord and love his sheep. **Amen.**

Pastor Barney