

Seeing the Future with New Eyes

September 2, 2018

Sermon by Pastor Cindy Bullock

The Holy Gospel according to Saint John. (John 21: 4-19)

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this [Jesus] said to him, "Follow me."

The Gospel of our Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today we finish up the series on "Seeing with New Eyes." We've talked about how to see with new eyes, about seeing ourselves with new eyes, about seeing others with new eyes. And today we look toward the future. Now, around here, when we're thinking about the future, it's probably more like it's the end of summer and things are starting up, like school, for instance, or church programming. And there is a little tinge of chill in the air. I hate to mention that.

But if you go a little further into the world's future, what do you see? What's coming? What are we looking toward? You know, it feels pretty up for grabs these days. Who knows what will happen next?

I grew up in the '60's. And those of you who might remember back that far might remember that in those days the world was full of dreams, dreams of the future. It was all about scientific discovery and the space race. The *Jetsons* was the future. Do you remember what it was like to get your first color TV? Do you remember what it was like to get your first microwave – the big old clunky thing that we risked radiation so we could have tough meat – but it was really fast! This was the beginning. We couldn't wait for all the new things that would happen in the future.

Then in the '80's and '90's we were unstoppable. With the economic boom, we thought we could have it all. The Minnesota Legislature was planning to end poverty by 2020. The future looked like the American dream was coming true. We could save the world with our spending power.

Then the millennia turns, and 9-11 happened, and the future became a bit more fearful. We gave up some freedoms. We put cameras everywhere. We agreed to take off our shoes and our belts in TSA lines. The future meant staying safe. Keeping an eye on anyone anywhere who wanted to hurt us, so someday we could get back to the dreaming.

The great recession came. Jobs were hard to find. People lost homes and savings. We stopped trusting big institutions and legislation. We sought safety in being tribal: small and likeminded. No big organizations or memberships. Safe, contained, anonymous. Keeping our heads down to move into the future.

So what is it that we dream now for the future? Do we dream about going back to what was? Do we hope for a new time of daring and adventure? What does the future even look like? It's like there is this fog out there. We can't quite tell what's coming.

Have you noticed how, in the past, say, decade, books, and TV, and movies about the future have gotten really dark. Remember about the zombie apocalypse? We watched the *Walking Dead* or the *Last Man on Earth*. We think about what will happen after biological warfare and nuclear disasters. Where are the dreams of exploring the stars? Where are the dreams of a world at peace? Where is our hope?

We need some stories about hope and resurrection; stories of the power of love that rebuilds from the ashes. Stories, I dare say, of God's presence and creative possibilities touching the world. We need a good dose of hope and wonder to counter the epidemic of fear. What we need is a bit of breakfast on the beach. The water lapping up, a little charcoal smell in the air; a little bread, a little fish, sitting with Jesus by the fire, poking at the coals. It's a great story we heard this morning – a hopeful, energizing story, full of the future.

But the story doesn't start hopeful. I believe this story from John's Gospel begins in grief. Yes, I know, it's after Easter. And, yes, the disciples do know that Jesus has risen from the dead. And, yes, the world has changed forever. Or has it?

John doesn't tell this big adventurous story about what happens next. There is no story of Pentecost in John, with fire and wind, and thousands of people joining the church in one day. That's in Luke. In John's Gospel, what comes after the resurrection is small, personal. Jesus breathes on the disciples the evening of the resurrection, and he says, "*Take in the Holy Spirit.*" It's as quiet as a breeze. And then we hear nothing more.

What do the disciples do now? What do people who have witnessed resurrection do with everyday life? How do you live your life if you've seen the power of God for change and newness? These disciples have no idea what to do – or at least it looks that way. They're back home in Galilee, weeks, maybe months, after the resurrection. And they're fishing. Isn't that where they started? Has anything changed in three years?

Here they are fishing, and not catching anything, all night long. Which is not so much about good fishing practice as it is about setting the scene. John's Gospel is all about light and darkness. When Judas goes out to betray Jesus, John writes, "*And it was night.*" Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night, and cannot understand what he said. He can't believe that God could love the world. Night is the setting of doubt and misunderstanding. It is a time of fear and disbelief. Remember Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb before dawn on Easter morning. And she doesn't know what's going on. She doesn't understand until later, after dawn, when she sees Jesus.

Today's Gospel begins at night – much like where our world is now – looking at the past, uncertain about the future, wondering about the ability of God to make things right. These guys are out in Galilee fishing. Has anything changed at all? And if the resurrection hasn't change the world, what's it about?

So there they are, fishing, and tired, and frustrated, and unsure. And that is precisely where they find Jesus. In the dark. Not among the lilies and alleluias. Not in some kind of dream world, but among the stinky fish. Not in the perfect future, but in the doubts of here and now. Jesus is there. Even if they don't recognize him, Jesus is there, making a way for them. Jesus is there, providing abundance and grace.

Jesus is there – and here. Here is where we encounter the Risen Christ. It's where we see resurrection happen daily, in the ordinary, in the dark, when we are unsure and don't know what will become of us. In the unknown and in the doubting, in the times we're without hope, it's then that we hear Jesus call us to trust, trust in God's good future.

And what is God's good future? What can we dream of? For what can we hope? Try these things:

1. God is a God of grace. We try, we fail, we try again, we get it right, we try again. That is the life of faith, the rhythm of our days. We don't have to be perfect to reach God's future. We can return again and again to the God who loves us, forgives us, strengthens us, and will be there.

2. We know that God cares for the poor, the forgotten, and the oppressed. There will be a place for everyone in God's future. Equally loved. Get used to the idea. Everybody is invited to God's future.

3. We know that God provides abundance: wine at Cana, loaves and fishes, breakfast on the beach, friends to pitch in when times are hard, plentiful harvests, abundance of knowledge, new possibilities and opportunities. Even when what God gives is not what we expected, there is abundance. There will be abundance in God's future.

4. God is there. Whatever the future looks like, however it comes to pass, God is an active participant in it.

5. We know that God brings life into death, love into brokenness, and hope into failure. God always brings resurrection, always brings new relationships, new hope. Always. We can dream of what that might look like for the world. New life.

There on the beach, around the fire, Jesus reminds the disciples that God comes. That miracles of abundance and miracles of new life are always possible. That the future doesn't end with Easter; it just gets started. And Jesus says one more thing. He says, "*Follow me.*" Don't just trust in God's future, live into it. Live like it's already here. "*Follow me.*" Trusting in grace and new life and abundance for all.

Too many in our time have given up on the hope of a loving God who holds the future. They've heard too much about this what I call the vending machine God – if you put in the right lifestyle and the right prayers and the right beliefs, you get out what you wanted. Or people have heard too much about the power of human potential. We don't need God, they say. Which might be true if there weren't actual human beings involved in doing this. Or, people have tried to trust the God of love, but the community has failed them, the church has hurt them. Or people have never heard the wonders of the God of resurrection.

We are the ones who can tell of the dream of God's future. We can show what living in love and abundance looks like. We can invite with wild grace and wild hospitality. We can lean in and speak out with all of our brothers and sisters. We've been given a glimpse of a good and hopeful future. We can help this world see what that might look like. We are the ones who stand in the night and point toward the dawn.

Amen.