

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday After Easter  
April 30/May 1, 2022 Sermon

There are so many things going on in our lessons today that it is hard to choose which path to take. Saul is in a fit and wants to eliminate the upstart Nazarene's heresy. "Who are You?" The most important question that can ever be answered by any one of us. Saul becomes Paul and learns what it means to be a suffering servant.

A picture of eternity where all creation cries out in worship, "Worthy is the Lamb." We are reminded that what our Lord has done is eternal and worthy of all honor and praise. This reminder in the face of our often and seeming indifference to the things of the Lord in our daily lives. We have hope because the Lord of all creation has provided the means by which, in faith and by grace, we walk in the truth that because He lives, we too shall live.

There are so many interesting things that are nuances in the text. In John's Gospel, it is called the Sea of Tiberias (although many translations put in Galilee in chapter six, even though the Greek is Tiberias). John wrote outside of Israel, probably from Ephesus where he ministered. Writing later than many other New Testament writers, he had an eye on the reality of the Roman Empire as well as the humble but simple truth that the Gospel is for all people.

In those days after the resurrection and prior to the Ascension, the disciples, not yet in the power of the Holy Spirit, went about their business almost as if nothing had changed. But things have changed.

Not that we have ever heard these words in these parts, but Simon Peter said, "I'm going fishing." The others decided to join him. Have you ever been in those places in life where you kind of knew that something was coming, but it wasn't here yet? You weren't sure what to do, but you were ready for whatever it was that was coming? I suspect this was one of those times for the disciples. They had all seen the Risen Lord. They knew things were different, but the change had not yet come upon their lives. They went out fishing, but caught nothing.

Jesus stood upon the shore. Note how he addresses them, "Children." Pay attention to this detail. Our Lord will lead us, but we are as children to Him. The Father will lead us and He has called us to become His children. A child understands the need to have a mentor. Sometimes I think we think of ourselves as more mature than we really are. Jesus knew they had not caught any fish. He gives a simple directive and they obey. We do well to obey the simple directives of the Lord. It is really quite a simple thing. We do not need to figure things out. The Lord already has them figured out. He is giving us messages within messages. The disciples cast their nets and pulled up 153 fish.

Now, it would be good for you to stop and ask, why 153? Scripture is very intentional about what it says. Why that number? Our first clue is that John uses the Roman Sea of Tiberias rather than the Sea of Galilee which was the local name. John is writing his Gospel for the whole world. The meaning, lost over time, was not lost to those who first read this Gospel. In the Roman world it was believed that there were 153 people groups in the world. The exact and actual number (from our modern perspective) is really quite unimportant. If I were to translate this to today's language, I would say that they pulled up the number of fish equaling the number of the groups of people in the whole world. Simply put, the message from Jesus was clear to them. From every tribe, tongue, folk, and nation, there will be those who are in the body of Christ. No one is excluded outright. As many as believe means that as many as believe are given the good news of the Gospel. We are not to be stingy with the word of the Lord, but share it with all whom we meet. The net is big enough and will not break.

It's a funny thing, but the faithful know when the Lord is speaking. He said to us that the sheep know His voice. This is true. I have heard all kinds of preaching, but when it is the voice of the Lord, I know it. Style is style and truth is truth. None of the disciples dared ask whether or not it was Jesus. They knew. He gave them bread and fish for breakfast. This was the third time He appeared to them.

We reach the point of Simon Peter goes on a walk with Jesus. The instructions are important. It is important that we understand the nuance of what transpires in this passage. There is a play on words that is lost in the translation. There are three exchanges and they sound similar, but each one is different. Jesus asks Simon if he loves Him. The word Jesus uses is the Greek word for God's love. "Do you love me?" Simon answers with the Greek word for brotherly love (the word used which we know as the city of brotherly love – Philadelphia). Jesus tells Simon to feed the lambs. The second time, Jesus asks the same question and receives the same answer (with the different Greek words). Jesus tells Simon to tend the sheep. In other words, grow the lambs into sheep. The faith is taught, caught, and grown. It is not a once and done thing, but something that must be nurtured, tended, and grown.

A third time Jesus asks Simon, but this time He lowers to the lesser word for love. Simon is grieved. Why the grief? Jesus must come to us. We cannot go to Him, He must come to us. Never forget this simple lesson. I can do all things only through Christ. Without Him, I can do nothing. If Jesus does not come to me, it is hopeless. If He comes to me, I can be lifted up to do whatever He would give me to do. It is this way as it must be. We do well to take to heart the lesson of this exchange lest we think that equality with God is something to be grasped. It is not. In answer to this third question, Jesus tells Simon to feed the sheep. We are reminded that it all depends upon the Lord.

Feed the lambs, tend the sheep, and feed the sheep. This is the pattern of the shepherd. The food is God's love. "Do you love me?" the Lord asks. With all that I am able is the correct response. Then love those whom I entrust to you. Our faith is built upon loving one another. We are to raise up those who will grow in the love of Christ. We are to feed one another with the love of God.

When you look at all of these stories there is a common thread which we do well to understand. Saul who becomes Paul and Simon who becomes Peter would both die a martyrs death. Not even good health is promised, for both had medical issues in the latter years. Following the Lord sometimes means that we will be taken to places we would rather not go. What is unconditional about the Gospel is the truth that we are love by the Lord. He has loved us enough to go to the cross for each and every one of us.

What we are promised is twofold. First, God loves us and, second, He will come to take us to be with Him. What happens in this life will happen. We have no guarantees that things will be to our liking. In fact, we are more assured that things will not go well for the faithful in this world because the world first hated Jesus and then, hates those who follow Him, It is the very thing that Saul was doing before the Lord got hold of him.

We are born in the waters of our baptism as lambs and through the tending and feeding, we become sheep of the Lord's fold. The Good Shepherd is with us always and will never leave nor forsake us. We are in His love with the command to go into all the world and love others as we have been loved. No matter what happens in this age, we know the Lord goes before us and leads the way. He asks if You love Him. If so, then He sends each of us with a simple command, "Come, follow me." Amen.