

Over the past few weeks, I have experienced the joy of meeting my new granddaughter, seeing my grandson, and visiting my kids, I have experienced the ordeal of getting sick with Covid for a second time, again living in quarantine for two weeks, I have experienced the challenge of facing multiple travel obstacles, grieving as I missed Holy Week and Easter services with you, and finally getting home and experiencing the joy of our time with Rev. Dr. Jim Antal. Quite frankly, I feel like I have been on an exhausting, emotional rollercoaster.

As we look at our gospel reading this morning, I think the disciples have been on an exhausting, emotional rollercoaster, one much more intense and traumatic than the one I experienced, and they are now experiencing emotional overload. First, there had been that tension-filled yet joyous entry into Jerusalem which was followed by a Passover meal unlike any other. Then, there was that intense experience of Jesus' betrayal and arrest. They had witnessed jeering mobs as Jesus was given a mock trial, beaten, and ultimately sentenced to death by bloody, torturous crucifixion. This left them emotionally crushed, numb, and afraid. They had been so afraid by this turn of events they fled, deserting Jesus in his last hours. And, before they had time to process what had happened, they

experienced emotional overload of another sort with the news of the empty tomb and the various resurrection appearances which had to be seen to even be believed. The past few weeks had truly been confusing and overwhelming as they experienced emotional extremes from the deepest, darkest grief to the most unexpected, ecstatic joy. It is probably an understatement to say they were experiencing emotional overload.

In the aftermath of all that has happened, the disciples needed some time to process all they have experienced and think about what they would now do. So, they returned to Galilee. They go back home to find a new sense of normal while trying to assimilate all that has happened. They go back to what they know, attempting to escape to what is **familiar to them**, to what **had been** routine and ordinary, to what **had** been a way of life before Jesus took them on a disruptive three-year excursion. When back home, impetuous, reactive, Peter announces he is going fishing. And, following his lead, several of the other disciples tag along.

After the extreme, earth-shattering experiences of the past weeks, Peter and the others board a fishing boat and go **back** to handling those heavy nets throughout the cold night. Now, it is important to remember that Peter is the one who had denied Jesus **three** times. He had failed Jesus, and fear had led him to distance himself **from** Jesus. We are left to

imagine his disappointment with **himself** and the feelings of guilt and shame he was most likely experiencing. And now, as he attempts to go back to what his life used to be like, his efforts are fruitless. After a night of fishing, the disciples are **not** able to catch any fish. In addition to having failed Jesus, Peter is confronted with failing at something he has done all his life, something that had been his vocation.

As they begin to catch the first glimmers of dawn break into the dark of night, the disciples see a man on the shore standing by a small charcoal fire. This stranger calls out to them suggesting something very odd saying, “Cast your nets on the other side of the boat.” The disciples comply and suddenly their net is full and overflowing with fish! Well, when one of the disciples recognizes this stranger as the Lord, impetuous, reactive Peter jumps out of the boat and clambers toward shore. The disciples discover that it is in fact Jesus who stands there and invites them to enjoy breakfast on the beach.

After gathering around the charcoal fire and finishing their breakfast of bread and grilled fish, Jesus begins grilling Peter. Speaking directly to this guilt plagued disciple, Jesus **lovingly and graciously** asks, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” Jesus asks him this question **three** times and, undoubtedly, Peter remembers standing around

another charcoal fire where he had **denied** Jesus three times. When Jesus asks him for the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter seems almost irritated by Jesus’ persistence. But, in his persistence, Jesus shows he will **not** disown Peter or let him go. The betrayed one bestows overwhelming grace on the betrayer. And, as theologian William Loader suggests, “Almost irritated by divine grace, Peter opens himself to life and leadership. Peter **will** feed the sheep. Peter **will** follow Jesus, as he said.” With these three affirmations of love, the trajectory of Peter’s life is **forever** changed as Jesus now tells Peter what to do with that love – **feed** his lambs, **tend** his sheep, and **feed** his flock.

In this experience, Peter and the other disciples discover that going back to their former life and trade is **not** an escape. The ordinary and the routine will no longer be ordinary and routine. The disciples discover that there is absolutely **no** place where they can go or where they can escape the **forgiveness and love** of this one who has changed them **forever**. So, whether we are on emotional overload or not, what does this story mean for us and how does the resurrection change our lives right here and right now? There are as many responses to Easter today as there were two thousand years ago. Some flee from the good news and consider it an “idle tale.” Some go out and share the good news. Some return to their

homes as did the disciples. But, going home to hide from Jesus is NOT an option for us any more than it was for Peter and the disciples. The implications of this Easter news are deep. We are **completely** loved. We are **completely** forgiven. When fear or guilt or shame hold us back, love is **always** going to call us forward. We are a people who have been **Eastered**, and we no longer need to make choices out of fear. We can now move away and break free from the fear that binds us and make choices that are rooted in love for **others**, even love for those we consider different from us.

Yes, the good news is that we have been Eastered! And, we are called not only to **proclaim** God's love, a love we have seen and known in Jesus, but to also **act** on it by feeding and tending God's sheep, **all** of the others in our lives. That means setting aside the way fear binds us up into small lives and small ways of living. That means embracing **love** as the basis of every action we undertake. In the resurrection, God's love has been set loose in this world and that love is transforming the world through this broken body of Christ to which we belong and of which we are a part. Just as Jesus confronted Peter in the depth of his despair and guilt and, as we heard in our first reading, just as Jesus also confronted Paul who was angrily breathing threats of murder fed by misguided zeal, Jesus confronts

us in the depth of all that is **not** life giving but life taking. And, that confrontation always comes to us as **grace and love**, changing our perspective, giving us new eyes to see, and NEVER leaving us where we have been or even where we are, but drawing us forward into life and love itself.

Paige, Kaden, and Austin, Jesus is speaking to you today. As I have said over and over to you, the most important thing I hope you will always remember is that God loves you and God showers you with grace and God will never ever let you go, no matter what you do and what happens to you in life. In the face of such overwhelming love, our response really is all about sharing that love with others. And, as you are about to make affirmation of your baptism, God is speaking to you and asking, “Paige, Kaden, and Austin, do you love me? Then, feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep.” Quite frankly, God is asking each one of us gathered here this morning, “Do you love me? Then, feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep. Share my love and grace with others and live out that love and grace in relationship to **all** people as you work for justice, peace, and healing in this world.” We live in the morning light of the resurrection and there is **no** room for guilt or fear. We are forgiven, loved and freed. And, yes, we have some work to do. We have some sheep to feed.