

## ***Teaching Them to Fish***

A Message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

May 1, 2022

by Rev. Dave Le Grand

Have you heard the proverbial piece of wisdom:

Give someone a fish and you feed them for a day.

Teach them to fish, you feed them for many days.<sup>1</sup>

Many different sources are credited for this principle, intended to relieve poverty by nurturing self sufficiency. Last week we were left hanging; after the crucifixion, the disciples apparently had not trusted Jesus' promise that death would not be the end. Last week, John's Gospel told us that they were cowering in a locked room together shortly after the crucifixion.

They needed some reassurance:

- First Jesus appeared to Mary at the empty tomb;
- Then, he appeared to the disciples when Thomas was absent;
- Then, again, appeared when Thomas was in that locked room.

So they don't stay locked in that room; Peter says that he will go fishing, and friends opt to join him. After a long night without fish, a stranger on the beach gives some unsolicited advice. I'm betting that there is some of the story not told, because having fished all night – perhaps those fisher-follower of Jesus, at first, may not have received that advice gracefully. After the catch almost sinks the boat, we see dear, naked, Peter recognizing Jesus and jumping into the water. He is all in. <sup>2</sup>

John the storyteller is returning us, the listeners, to the basics of being a follower of Jesus. What does it mean?

In the first chapel of John, Jesus meets the fisherfolk where they are in ordinary, mundane life – fishing, they drop their nets and follow. Now, in John's story, Jesus has been crucified, a sense of tragedy in the air. We shouldn't forget that Peter has let his Lord and Leader down, when he denied being a disciple of Jesus after the arrest and people cornered him.

Have you had moments like this? A succession of things just not going your way, and you just want to lock yourself away, wallow in self pity? Peter decides that trying as best he can to reclaim some normality might be the best thing. Evidently the others do too. And, out on the boat, that feeling they had might be similar to our modern church aspiring to normality in pandemic times. Things are not at all like before, but we try to soldier on. In our struggle, though, muddling, grieving, holiness has a way of finding us, inviting us to renew our sense of calling as children of God.

I sat with a very special person in my previous church. Her name was Nan and she was a spiritual leader in that community. I asked Nan what her favourite story in the Bible

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<sup>1</sup> Attributed to various sources, one being (October 1962, The Winnipeg Free Press) where the saying was spoken during a meeting of the Winnipeg Council of Women by Miss Anna Speers, discussing her work on the Canadian Freedom from Hunger Committee, calling it a Chinese proverb: <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2015/08/28/fish/>

<sup>2</sup> Karoline Lewis Sermon Brainwave May 1 2022 workingpreacher.org

was. She recalled this story of Jesus meeting the disciples waiting for them on the beach. Nan was quietly, graciously, journeying into death at home. We, sitting by her side, laughed and cried – her children, all who have now passed away, were there. I felt that sacredness of that liminal space, so close to the great mystery of death, yet feeling peace and joy.

Nan seemed to me at that moment like Peter, ready for her call to glory. We, not quite there. Grieving. Wishing we could keep her here, just a little longer.

I invite you to take a moment to ponder this: Is there somehow an aspect of your life where you feel like you are grieving? Feeling in limbo?

Peter might be a good character for all of us to focus on. Peter, the one who really botched things up. He said he would never let Jesus down, but Jesus said he would. And he did. Peter, like us, tries to go about normal life, fishing. It was a terrible night, but he was doing what he knew. Jesus, on the other side of crucifixion, met Peter and friends. Reminded them that their call as Christians was not defined by crucifixion, but by resurrection.

He reawakened their call to fish, to invite people to new life. I can see the smile on Nan's face as we reflected on this Bible story together. She was on that beach, teaching us to fish that day. Holiness meets us in those mundane, sometimes excruciatingly normal times of our lives when we least expect it. Amen.