

# **Sermon for April 23, 2017 – Encore! Encore!**

Second Sunday of Easter, Year A – Texts: John 21:1-19

## **Westwood First Presbyterian Church**

**Rev. Jeff Colarossi**

“After these things,” John says. After Jesus had been crucified and buried, after He had risen from the dead and appeared to His disciples. After all these things, “Jesus showed Himself again.” Why?

I remember lots of concerts I’d been to when I was younger. Those times when the band or the singer had left the stage before we in the audience were ready for them to be done. We got to our feet. We clapped and whistled. We held our lighters high. We shouted, “Encore! Encore!” And a few minutes later the singer or band bounded back onto the stage, they grabbed their instruments and launched into the finale. Those last few songs we’d been waiting the whole concert to hear. I can understand why they came back. There was something unfinished about the concert, something that they needed to do before we could let them go. Most folks will say that this is the best part of the concert.

But what about Jesus? What kind of encore can you play after you have risen from the dead? What sort of finale would add anything to that most final of acts? The clues are abundant. At the beginning of the epilogue of John’s gospel (chapter 21), the disciples have left Jerusalem. They’re gathered by the Sea of Galilee. Simon Peter is there along with Thomas, Nathanael, James, John and “two others of His disciples.” What they’re doing there we can only guess. They seem to be waiting for something. Or perhaps for someone. You can almost hear the clock ticking. Finally, Peter says to the others, “I’m going fishing.” And with a sigh of relief (or resignation) they offer to go with him. I don’t know that John means it this way, but Peter’s words in this passage have always depressed me. All those high hopes he’d had when he was with Jesus have come crashing down. And now with hope seemingly gone, with no reason to continue forward, Peter goes back to that thing he knows best: fishing. Not that there’s anything wrong with fishing. It’s honest work. And it’s work that Peter knows. But Peter’s been up on the high slopes, literally, on the mountain top with Jesus, and now is now literally back down at sea level. That’d be bad enough. But to make matters worse, Peter cannot succeed at the thing to which he’s resigned himself. “That night they caught nothing,” the gospel adds flatly. And can’t you just see Peter? He flings his net out over the black waters again and again, hauling them in dripping wet and as empty as his dreams. “What’s the use?” he mutters under his breath. “What’s the point? “Even the one thing I thought I could do I can’t do anymore.” But then day breaks and a stranger asks the question all fisherman have heard from the shore: “Caught anything, boys?” They shake their heads sheepishly, possibly a little embarrassed, no. Nothing. “Cast the net on the right side of the boat,” He suggests, and for some reason, perhaps to humor the stranger, they do. But this time everything changes. This time they are unable to haul it in because of the live, wiggling weight of the fish they have caught.

Like the parallel story in Luke 5, the miraculous catch serves as an epiphany, a revelation. It shines a light on the stranger, showing Him for who He really is! The disciple whom Jesus loves turns to Peter, and he says with a gasp, “It is the Lord!”

Impulsive as ever Peter throws on his clothes and jumps into the water. He begins swimming toward shore while the others drag the full net along behind the boat. At first his strokes are long and strong, then he slows as he gets closer to shore, closer to Jesus. One can only guess what's going through Peter's mind! What will Jesus say when the two of them stand face to face? How will he explain not only his denial of Jesus, but the denial of his calling as a disciple?

You might recall that in the previous chapter of John's gospel Jesus had appeared to the disciples in the upper room. It's the evening of that first Easter day. As if out of nowhere, through locked doors, He appears before them and says: "Peace be with you." He shows them His hands and His side and the disciples rejoice! He says again: "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, so I send you." Then, He breathes on them and says: "Receive the Holy Spirit." And sent them out into the world with the words: "As the Father sent Me, so I send you." So, Peter's denied Jesus and appears to be ignoring Jesus instructions by going fishing. In any case, Peter comes ashore and after what was undoubtedly an awkward breakfast with the other disciples, Jesus nods to Peter and they start off down the beach. The conversation between the two is one of the most touching and poignant in the entire Bible... "Simon, son of John" says Jesus, "do you love Me more than these?" And Peter, I imagine somewhat pained by the question, answers, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." And then Jesus asks it again, "Simon son of John, do you love Me?" Again, Peter's answer, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." And then again: "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Each time Peter answers with all the sincerity he can muster, his anguish becoming ever more evident in his voice. And each time Jesus follows his response with a simple command: "Feed My lambs. Tend My sheep". "Feed My sheep."

Most scholars believe that Peter's threefold profession of his love for Jesus parallels his threefold denial, that Jesus is giving Peter the chance to fill the hole he's dug for himself with three huge shovelfuls of love. They're probably right. There's a symmetry here. But I'm thinking that there's more. Because, let's face it, with Jesus there always is. Jesus is not only trying to bring Peter back to where he was before, He wants to move him **beyond** that. Jesus looks Peter in the eye and speaks to him. He speaks the words that won him in the first place: "Follow me." Suddenly it's clear. Jesus has made this encore appearance for Peter's benefit. In the same way He returned for Thomas, to move him from doubt to faith. He now returns for Peter, to move him from faith to **action**. And here's the thing, perhaps in these days after the resurrection we need that as much as Peter did. Something to stir us from faith to action!

We've come down from the high, grand, joy of Easter, and now find ourselves stuck in the same sea-level routine. We've seen the risen Lord and we've believed, right? But what difference has it made? Has it, in fact, made a difference? Perhaps having heard the invitation to follow so long ago we need to hear it again and then act. Perhaps we, like Peter, need to be moved from faith to action. What would it be like to hear Jesus ask us: Westwood First Presbyterian Church, do you love Me? Would we say, "Yes, Lord, You know we love You"? Fine, says Jesus, Feed my lambs. How many times would He need to ask us? How many more times do we need to hear that faith is more than believing? More than thinking, or talking, More than having certain convictions about Jesus. Faith is action! Faith is movement. Faith is activity. Faith is something you do, not something you have! Jesus never asked for worshippers, He wants followers!

Brothers and sisters – it's still Easter! Jesus is still risen! Like Peter, the Church has yet another opportunity for a fresh start! But this resurrection life is not just a resuscitation, not a restoration of the old life, but a completely new life!

We have then, an opportunity. Not to be brought back to where we were before, but to move beyond that. That's Jesus' call, to move beyond, to seek more, to be more. Better. Braver, maybe. Stronger, hopefully. But willing, nevertheless, to do more. Jesus seeks to return us to our calling as God's people, as His image-bearers in the world! To show forth His love, the love that endured the cross and grave. Wherever we've been He wants to move us **beyond** that. He calls us to follow, to feed His lambs, to tend His sheep, to live out our calling as the Body of Christ.

I want to leave you with these words from the hymn, "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind."

*Dear Lord and Father of mankind, forgive our foolish ways!  
Re-clothe us in our rightful mind – in purer lives Thy service find,  
In deeper reverence, praise...  
In deeper reverence, praise!*

*In simple trust like theirs who heard, beside the Syrian sea,  
The gracious calling of the Lord – let us, like them, without a word,  
Rise up and follow Thee...  
Rise up and follow Thee!*

Thanks be to God.

Amen and amen.