

Follow Me

The gospel today is taken from the gospel of St. John; the 21st chapter, beginning at the first verse:

"Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathaniel of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee and two others of His disciples. Simon Peter said to them "I am going fishing." They said to him "We will go with you." They went out and got into a boat but at that night they caught nothing. Just after daybreak Jesus stood on the beach but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. And 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 who Jesus loved said to Peter "It is the Lord." When Simon Peter heard 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 full net 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. And 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; one hundred and 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 these disciples dared to ask him "Who are you?" Because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus took the bread, He gave it to them and the same with the fish. This is now the third

time that Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead. When they had finished eating 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." And Jesus said to him "Feed my lambs." The 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." And Jesus said to him "Tend my sheep." He said to him a third time "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he had 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 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 He said to him "Follow me."

Here ends the reading from the Gospel of John. So in this Gospel lesson this is Jesus' third and final representation after His death and after His resurrection. And he appears to the disciples when they're fishing. And if I were Jesus' strategist, I would have thought of better places to show up. I would have gone to Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate's house, I think that would have been dramatic or maybe downtown somewhere where everybody could have seen Him; something a little bit more, shall we say 'showy;' you know, a real event. But when Jesus does something it's always for a reason. And so He shows up with His followers in the most mundane, normal of circumstances; they're fishing, they eat together and He essentially is passing on leadership to the next generation of the church in this gathering. And the story is full

of symbolism: fish right? If you remember early on in the gospels Jesus calls the disciples and says "I'm going to make you Fishers of Men," and takes these Fishermen and says "you're going to be spiritual leaders," and so here we are full circle back at the fish and fishing and the symbolism of fishing for human beings; give them a purpose, meaning in spiritual life. And then the symbolism continues when He comes ashore and he talks about feed my sheep, the Good Shepherd and Jesus being the Good Shepherd, take care of my sheep, the innocence of sheep and He's calling them to a new form of leadership; a leadership that is kind not top-down, authoritarian but really love these followers and it's a message that we can here today and it's still shocking that we're really not, even at that level today we're in leadership, we respect and love those that are being led, very often it's "Follow me, this is the rule," and Jesus is introducing a new concept: "Take care of my people." His last act with the Last Supper was to wash their feet and He said if you want to follow me, you need to be a servant and here He's saying "Feed my sheep." And He says it three times, a little puzzling. Anybody know why He asks the question three times? Anybody have a guess?

[CONGREGANT: The Trinity]

The Trinity? Good guess, that could be. What did Peter just do to Jesus when he was arrested? He denied Him three times; so this is an absolution, this is you know, "you've denied me three times and it's forgotten and Peter will become the leader of this new community so he is essentially giving absolution and forgiveness in that asking it three times. But the part of the story that I'm really intrigued with, that I

really have not heard anybody preach on so we might find that I'm way off base on this one, is something we really don't talk much in church or in sermons, but I'm struck by the fact that Jesus came to them when they were providing their daily bread, meaning they fished for a living and the fish were what they ate it's also what they sold and he made them successful in it. And for my part, having coached now hundreds of social change leaders, the biggest challenge for people who want to change the world, who are receiving a call the way Peter does later, is they basically say "I can't give up income to follow this call." It's a huge problem and so people live sort of smaller than their purpose because they're worried about the money and we live in a society even more complex financially than the time of Jesus where you could eat your own fish and grow your own crops a little bit; much more poverty then than today actually but we're in a complicated economy where by our very nature we're almost all in debt to somebody, whether it's a car or a house or a credit card, we're always wrestling with money and it's not much talk about the church and my interpretation is that He's coming and saying "I'll take care of that," that's why He says "Throw the net on that side." If you're stepping into your call, if you're stepping into your greater purpose, I will take care of your needs as well; give us this day our daily bread we say it every week right? And I think Jesus is saying "I can handle that." This is a very tricky place for spiritual people because for those in the reading group, this book 'One simple idea' about positive thought, it talks about the history of positive thought from Swedenborg, through Christian science and how it became a healing, but eventually it became the 'Prosperity Gospel.' The Prosperity Gospel essentially says "God give me money and give me a lot of it and I want it manifested now." And I'm very uncomfortable with that personally, I don't think

that's the message. I don't think it's about living in this world and being consumed by the consumer culture of this world. But I do think that we often forget when we talk about spiritual life and following our call, that we can turn to God on the financial needs and it's not the Prosperity Gospel which is give me money and give me a lot of it, but having a simple lifestyle and living into your call is really important.

A coach and Author that I've worked with, a guy named Tim Kelly has a book called 'True purpose' and he has an exercise in his book that I have not seen anywhere else and he works with major change makers and he works with entire countries. He's working with the country of Israel on its purpose for example and in the book he basically says "write down all of your conditions that are stopping you from achieving your purpose. What is it?" And people are a little shy in the beginning and they go "Well I'd like a nice place to live, I want a car and I want these things. I want this lifestyle." It's rarely a grandiose list but they're basically saying "until these are met, I'm not following my purpose." It's an interesting exercise and what he has discovered is until people can articulate it, they never really admit that the reason they're not following their purpose is because they're afraid and that fear is often financial and that's not something that we like to talk about. We don't like to talk about money or our financial needs and they're very real and that liberates them to actually achieve their greater purpose.

And so I think, in this text, we might be being told that each of us has a purpose and, like Peter, we're being called into something greater. This little community that

we're building here at this church, I think we're called to some purpose and financial discussions will be a part of it. I don't think we should be embarrassed by that. I think the Lord will take care of our needs and that's the state in the faith, when we are in providence or living to our greatest use but we're in the flow, I think the financial needs can be met and I think we can be open about that and talk about that and raise that in our prayers and have that in our discussions and I think when we have the two together, Jesus coming back in physical form in the body, we are a body religion about God coming in human form. When we're traveling in the real world we have real needs. Our purpose and mission is pretty cosmic and very spiritual but I think the two must go together; we have to acknowledge them both. And I think when we have those two wedded together, a clear purpose for ourselves and our finances, and our daily needs met, I think we can really listen to Christ who then says "Follow me." Amen.