

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter, C**

#### **My Dear Brothers and Sisters,**

What have the past two weeks been like for you? Have you seen and experienced resurrection in your life? What does it look like? Here is why I am asking. Two weeks ago, we celebrated the day of Jesus' resurrection. Two weeks ago, the stone was rolled away, the tomb was empty, and Jesus was seen alive. And here is my question. Are you more alive now? Am I? What difference has the resurrection made in us? I am not asking about what difference it might make in some distant heavenly future. I am asking about our lives today, here, and now.

I sometimes wonder if we make such a big deal about the resurrection that it is difficult to recognize it in our own lives. I wonder if we make such a big deal about the rolled away stone, such a big deal about the empty tomb, and such a big deal about Jesus being alive that we lose sight of the resurrection in our lives. We look for and expect it to be an equally big deal kind of thing in our lives. Maybe that's the problem. Maybe that's why it is sometimes challenging to recognize resurrection in our lives here and now.

Please don't misunderstand me, I am not saying that resurrection is not a big deal. I am saying that maybe, and maybe more often than not, the big deal of the resurrection happens in the small details of everyday life. Maybe the big deal of the empty tomb is experienced in the

ordinary circumstances of life. Maybe the big deal of Jesus being alive is revealed in the routine of life.

Let me explain why I say that. John begins today's gospel by telling us that Jesus **“revealed himself in this way.”** John then sets the third appearance of Jesus to his disciples amidst ordinary circumstances. He returns the disciples to their old routines. He gives a lot of small, seemingly unnecessary, and even strange details. John could just as easily have said, **“While the disciples were fishing, they saw Jesus on the shore. This was his third appearance.”** But he didn't. Instead, John focuses on the details in which Jesus showed himself; so maybe we should too.

That's what I want to do today. I want to explore the details John gives us in today's gospel and play with the images in a way that I hope will help us recognize Jesus' resurrection in the details of our own lives.

The disciples have returned home. They have gone back to fishing. They have moved from the empty tomb to their boats, from the house in Jerusalem to the familiar waters of the Sea of Tiberias. They have traveled some 70 or 80 miles from the place of Jesus' resurrection and given themselves to their old fishing routine. They have returned to the same boats, the same nets, the same water, the same work. That's when and where Jesus **“showed himself.”**

It is two weeks after Easter Sunday, and I bet we have all returned to our routines. That's when and where we can expect Jesus to show

himself to us. Resurrection does not happen apart from the routines of life but in them. Resurrection is not about escaping life but about becoming alive.

They fished through the darkness, but their nets were empty. **“That night they caught nothing.”** The darkness, however, was not just about the night sky. The darkness was also in the disciples. In the same way, the empty net is not only descriptive of their fishing efforts but also of the disciples themselves. They are as empty as their nets. Who here hasn’t experienced that darkness and emptiness? You know what that’s like. You fish, work, and do your best, but still become empty. In those times, we have come to the limits of our self-sufficiency. We have nothing to show for our efforts and nothing left to give. We are empty.

That’s when Jesus, still unrecognized by the disciples, shows himself and says, **“Children, have you caught anything to eat?”** That’s not so much a question as it is a statement. Within Jesus’ words, I hear the echo of Mary’s voice at the wedding in Cana when she said to Jesus, **“They have no wine.”** Empty nets, empty jars, no wine, no fish, no life. That’s when Jesus showed himself.

Nets and jars cannot be filled unless they are first emptied. In the same way, we can never be filled with Jesus until we are first emptied of ourselves, until we come to recognize the limits of our self-sufficiency. Emptiness is not the end or a failure, but a beginning. The miracle begins when the wine runs out. Jesus shows up when the nets are empty.

So let me ask you this. What are your empty nets today? What wine jars have run dry? Don't throw the jars away, and don't abandon your nets. They are the very places Jesus is showing himself to you. They will be places of resurrection – jars overflowing with the best wine and nets filled with large fish, 153 of them; wine to gladden your heart and fish to nourish your life.

Did you notice that all this happens just after daybreak? The dark night of fishing has given way to the dawn of a new day, new hopes, new possibilities. The darkness does not win. The light always prevails. In the light of this new day, in the light of a full net, in the light of 153 fish, Jesus shows himself. **“It is the Lord!”**

This is not just about the rising of the sun. It is about the rising of the Son in the darkness of the disciples' lives and in the darkness of our own lives. Whatever darkness has overcome you, whatever darkness you might be going through today, that darkness is the circumstances in which Jesus will show himself to you. It is the context for your resurrection and the raw material from which the new life will be fashioned.

As soon as Jesus is recognized, Peter, almost naked, gets dressed and jumps into the water. We probably could have gone a long time without knowing that Peter was practically naked. It is a strange and seemingly unnecessary detail. So, I have to wonder if John isn't telling us something more than that Peter wasn't wearing almost any clothes.

The last time Peter got out of the boat was preceded by him saying, **“Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.”** Not this time, however. Today is different. There are no conditions, no demands, no requests for a miracle. Peter gets dressed. I wonder, though, if he is doing more than clothing his nakedness. Peter is clothing himself with courage, clothing himself with joy, clothing himself with an urgency for Jesus. Fully clothed, he now plunges himself into the waters of new life.

What places or circumstances of your life need to be clothed with courage or joy? And if they were, how would that change your life? What might you do differently?

Whatever your answers might be, they are the places and ways Jesus shows himself to you. And here’s another little detail John offers us. Jesus is never far away, **“only about a hundred yards,”** always within easy reach.

I wonder what Peter thought when he got ashore and saw a charcoal fire. I wonder if he gazed into the flames, lost himself in the past, and remembered that other charcoal fire, the one by which he warmed himself and denied Jesus. I wonder if Peter heard the cock crow its exclamation point to his three denials of Jesus, its exclamation point to his guilt. I wonder if he was overcome with regret. I wonder if he was afraid. I wonder if he relived that night thinking, **“If only....”**

I only wonder about these things because that's often what I have done with my guilt, regrets, and betrayals. Maybe you have too. Perhaps you know what I am talking about.

Whatever Peter might have been thinking or feeling and whatever guilt the cock was growing in Peter's memory were interrupted, banished, and silenced by Jesus showing himself and saying, **“Come, have breakfast.”**

Jesus shows himself to us in the charcoal fires of our guilt, regrets, and betrayals. Those fires, however, have been extinguished and a new fire kindled. That's true for Peter, for you, and me. The Bread of Life himself has prepared a place for us at the table. The last supper has become the first breakfast, and the charcoal fire of denial has become a charcoal fire of welcome and invitation. What looked like endings have become new beginnings.

For most of us, shared meals also mean shared conversation, and so it does for Peter and Jesus. It was a conversation about love, freedom, and moving forward. **“Do you love me?”** Jesus asks Peter, not once but three times. One question for each of Peter's denials. Three times, Peter answers, **“Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.”** And I think he did. I think Jesus knew that Peter loved him, but Peter needed to know that he loved Jesus. Peter needed to understand that he was not bound to or identified by his past. How many of us also need to hear, understand,

and experience that repeatedly as if for the first time? That's another detail or circumstance of our lives where Jesus shows himself.

With each question-and-answer, Jesus drew Peter from his past and freed him to become himself and to be more fully alive. Isn't that what today's gospel has been about? It is the same story being told through the many different details and circumstances of our lives.

Jesus showed himself in the empty nets that were filled with large fish, the darkness that gave way to light, nakedness that was clothed, a charcoal fire of denial that became a fire of welcome and invitation, a last supper that became a first breakfast, and three denials that were forgiven with three affirmations of love.

**My Dear brothers and Sisters,**

Resurrection is in the details. That's true in today's gospel and our lives. The gospel details are our life's details. It is as if John has given us a paper with a bunch of dots on it, each one a particular detail or circumstance, and now our work is to connect the dots with the lines of our lives. And when we do, we discover resurrection. We find that we have a future, that Christ's life has guaranteed our life, and that he has shown himself to us. **Amen.**