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Reflection for May 1st service

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Fishing and Following

While I was on the ferry the other evening, I imagined myself to be on the Sea of Tiberius, on a fishing expedition. As in this Gospel rendition, the sides of the boat from which the disciples could catch fish were quite the opposite of each other: from one side, there were no fish caught; from the other, there were plenty. This caused me to reflect on Jesus' instructions to his disciples to "change sides," and they would find fish. I realized that I, like the disciples, get stuck on one side, in one point of view, expecting one result. I do not think of trying the other side, at which the result could be vastly different and better for not only myself, but for others. Success comes with resetting one's viewpoint, and moving toward a better solution. Be open to different angles in the situation: there could ultimately be reward and growth from doing this.

In the Gospel, I found it interesting that the fishing net, while very full, had not torn: this seems to allude to the fact that there was guidance and correct procedure in the operation, which is another indication of success, and God's divine intervention. When I listen to God's voice, I, too, go about my business in the sequence that God wants for me, not what I want for myself, and the result is greater fruitfulness, as well as peace!

How often do we find ourselves "empty," as the disciples first found their net on their side of the boat? After they dragged their full net of fish to shore, the disciples, while aware that they had been speaking with and were being directed by Jesus, did not come out and ask him who he was. They were already aware of the Divine Presence directing them to a fuller life than

they had at this point. This reminds me of what Richard Rohr refers to as the “ Universal Christ,” the Divine, who directs us. “ Lord, you know everything, “ says Peter.

Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves him, to which Peter replies, “ Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” And Jesus responds three times, in three different ways to “ feed lambs, tend sheep, and feed sheep.” I was struck by the triple rhythm of this : “ feed, tend , feed.” In life, when we show love, this is what we do to our partners, children, and pets, and also in our careers and vocations. This love really mirrors our love of God, and God’s love for us.

The lines of this passage of John which particularly resonated with me were verses 18 and 19, which say, “ Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go.”(This he said to show by what death he was to glorify God.) And after this he said to them, “Follow me.”

To be girded is to be encircled by a belt or band, which implies something being tightened around oneself. Another definition of girding is to prepare oneself for something difficult or challenging. I have definitely been in situations in my life where I was pulled in directions that were uncomfortable and challenging: buying and selling houses, dealing with the demands and decisions of children in both their young and now adult years; having colleagues provide criticism in my work.. I will say that all these situations , while painful and difficult, have led to growth.

Then Jesus says, “Follow me.” When I let these words sink in, after ruminating on life’s challenges, I let go, and listen.. As Thomas Keating says in the last line of his **Welcome Prayer,**” I open to the love and presence of God and God’s action within..” Girding then takes on a more benevolent connotation: I know that this is for my ultimate good, for community, for the world.

My expedition ended at Thrifty's , where I shopped for groceries. And, playing in the background was Carole King singing that old hit, " Where you lead, I will follow. " How serendipitous it was to hear that, having just read this passage of John.

I said a little prayer of thanks.