



Easter 3, Year C 2016 All Saints Burnaby

John 21:1-14

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 the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 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 whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that 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 net full 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. 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, a hundred 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 the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

From time to time BBC America rebroadcasts "The Vicar of Dibley." "The Vicar of Dibley" is a comedy series about the adventures of Mother Geraldine Granger and her eccentric parishioners at St. Barnabas Church in the small fictitious English village of Dibley.

Mother Granger is a kind of womanly spark plug, challenging St. Barnabas to do and be new things. In one episode, at Mother Granger's encouragement, the parish decides to form a choir. And so a time is set for auditions. But as happens in some small churches, no one thinks to publicize the auditions beyond putting up a small notice on the church's bulletin board. And so on the morning of the auditions, a nervous Vicar along with the organist-choirmaster open the doors of the church to see if any one has shown up to sing for them.

What they discover is that word of mouth works, for a surprisingly large group of people—probably half the villagers of Dibley—stand in a long line before them: a motley crew, to be sure, ranging from the very old and feeble to a group young punk rockers sporting purple spiked hair.

Mother Granger is, of course, delighted and turns to the choirmaster and says: "Well it looks like everyone's here. Let's get to it then; there's no time like the present." After a long and thoughtful pause, the choirmaster wistfully responds: "Yes, but then there was the past—the past was lovely, wasn't it?"

Our gospel story this morning is a story about the disciples being drawn back into a past that wasn't exactly lovely but was more bearable than their present. They go to the past, not because it was calm and carefree but because they don't know where else to go, they don't know what else to do.

To get to that particular past, they have to leave behind many experiences—their experiences of life with Jesus during his earthly ministry, their experiences of life with Jesus during the week before his suffering and death, their experiences of the two separate appearances of Jesus to them after the resurrection. They leave all of this behind and they return to fishing. Led by Peter, the disciples return to fishing.

Which, of course, I get! For when we, you and I, find ourselves in a stressful or perplexing present, we can be drawn back to the past, to past places, past patterns and past activities that we look to for can reassurance or respite.

But notice that in this story, the disciples' return to fishing doesn't end up giving them either reassurance or respite. Led by Peter, the disciples go back to fishing. They go back to fishing at night: night, of course, being not just a time of day but, more importantly, a state of being in the Gospel of John. They fish at night, and in their benighted state, they catch nothing.

And so this makes me wonder about the night fishing you and I might be up to these days. Night fishing: attempts to return to lives or a time that made sense in the past but does not make sense in the present, attempts to look for food in places that can no longer feed us. I wonder what kind of night fishing we might be up to in our lives.

Are you, for instance, like Peter and the disciples, drawn back into to a job or a vocation that was right for you in the past but that has come to feel like so much fruitless toil in the present? Or in an important relationship are you being drawn back into old ways of operating that simply can no longer work in the present? Or this—are you finding yourself trying to hold onto a spiritual life that fed you in the past but no longer feeds you? And finally this—are you, the community of All Saints as you live into another transition, are you

finding yourself at all tempted to want to return to former ways of operating that belong to a different time and, therefore, cannot lead to the kind of life God wants you to have in the present and in the future?

Night fishing: so understandable, so tempting, and, of course, so futile.

So futile because, as the disciples discover, when we go night-fishing, we don't end up catching anything. But, look at what our Jesus says about this. Rather than criticizing the disciples and us for our night fishing, Jesus, not yet recognized by the disciples, poses a gentle question to them, a question encouraging them to notice the fruitlessness of their labor, "Children," he asks, "you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No."

But in our story this is not where things end—with just the fruitlessness and failure of night fishing. Rather, when the disciples discover that returning to the past cannot feed them, they discover their own openness to listening to the mysterious figure on the shore, the one with day breaking behind him, as he tells them: "Cast the net to the right side of the boat," "Bring some of the fish that you have caught," and "Come and have breakfast." They learn to listen to the mysterious figure on the shore who, of course, is Jesus: the one who can be relied upon to guide and feed his own in the present and for the future.

Which brings things around to us again—here to us, the people of All Saints (and I include myself in this!), to those among us who have been baptized for years and to those who will be baptized today. While you and I are people who will always treasure the pasts we have been given by our families and friend, while we will always treasure the histories we have been given by our parishes, while we will always treasure the traditions we have been given by our Anglican heritage, our baptisms invite us, our baptisms call us, our baptisms impel us into the present moment, into a current day engagement with the real stuff of our lives, something I believe we can only do, trusting that God in Christ will be there with us, trusting that God in Christ will be there to guide us and to feed us.

"There's no time like the present" the Vicar of Dibley said. To this the choirmaster replied: "Yes, but then there's the past. It was lovely, wasn't it?" Whether it was lovely or not, dear people of God, Jesus is standing on the shore of the present calling to you to join him there. He is standing on the shore of the present calling to you and you and you.

