

John 20:19-31

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Galilee; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael 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.

When they had finished 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." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." A 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." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he 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 to 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."

Seeing with New Eyes

My experience of fishing is like Peter's before Jesus arrived on the scene – an experience of trying really hard, but netting zero. Zip. Nada.

For people like me, we wonder why others love fishing so much. And why - when it comes to fly fishing –they begin to talk in hushed and reverent tones, calling fly fishing a “religion.” Six years ago a lengthy academic paper was actually published on this topic – of fly fishing as religion. And of course author Norman McClean, in the opening line from A River Runs Through It, begins, “In our family, there was no clear line between religion and fly fishing....” His father, a Presbyterian minister and a fly fisherman told McClean and his brother about Christ's disciples being fishermen, “and we were left to assume, as my brother and I did, that all first-class fishermen on the Sea of Galilee were fly fishermen and that John, the favorite, was a dry-fly fisherman.”

These rapturous experiences of fishing – so contrary to my own – drove me to watch again the movie that came out just one year ago, in April 2012: Salmon Fishing in the Yemen. Did you catch it? The premise is as preposterous as its title: an extremely wealthy Sheik from Yemen, the southern-most country on the Arabian peninsula, falls in love with the sport of fly fishing in Scotland, and enlists the help of a highly skeptical Scotsman to import the sport to Yemen. The Scotsman – a rather stiff fisheries bureaucrat with a touch of Aspergers, explains curtly that this project would be, at best, a herculean task – requiring the damming of a Yemen mountain river to provide adequate water, the shipment of huge cold containers of live salmon into the desert country, and perhaps most unusual, trust that farm-bred salmon will run upstream, against the current, jumping salmon ladders, even though, unlike wild salmon, these farm fish have never – for several generations -- had to run upstream to mate and lay their eggs.

As the movie unfolds, we learn that the Sheik's vision comes not just from his love of the sport, and from the hope that it may bring needed water and jobs to his country; the Sheik also describes how he is seen when he comes to Great Britain – all others see are the billowing Arab robes he wears and his dark skin - the things that set him apart, make him alien. But when the Sheik is fishing in Scotland's waters, other fly fishers “don't care if I am brown or white, rich or poor, wearing robes in the water or waders. The only thing we all care about is the fish, the river and the game.” The values required in fly fishing –patience, tolerance, and humility – wipe out the differences.

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Do you ever wish you were seen differently, more for who you are, rather than for what you wear, your shape and size, what you achieve or fail to do? That's what our bible lessons today are about: about seeing with new eyes, from God's perspective, from what I call the Lens of Love. Seeing ourselves differently, seeing others differently, maybe even seeing God differently. And as a consequence, living our lives differently.

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The scene again is a fishing trip, and it takes place at the very, very end of the Gospel of John – the last story. It is after Jesus has been arrested and crucified, after Peter has denied three times that he ever even knew Jesus, after all the other disciples have run away in fear, *and* it is after their reconciliation -- after Jesus has risen from the dead, and has appeared to Peter, Thomas and the rest of the disciples again. They've already received the joyful good Easter news that Jesus is alive, not gone; they've already been blessed by the Holy Spirit; they've been sent out into the world.

So why, we're left to wonder, if all that happened already, why are Peter and the disciples back up north in Galilee, far from Jerusalem, out fishing at night?

Maybe Peter and the others did not yet fully understand what they were supposed to do next, and they were awaiting further instructions.

Maybe they are still frightened that they will be arrested, too, and are fishing under the cover of night.

Perhaps they have reverted to their comfort zone, what they know how to do, instead of starting the new pursuits, at which they fear they might fail.

Or was money tight – and they needed a night job in order to support their day ministry?

We don't know. But I sense that what was holding Peter and the others back was a far greater impediment than just lacking money. Oh yes, money is something we need – in our families, for our projects -- as true for the Sheik in Yemen to support his idea, as it is for any of us, as it is for our congregation, if we are to grow.

But the far more vital thing needed for the disciples, for all of us, was the new perspective, the new way of seeing ourselves and others, the new way of seeing opportunities, and our abilities to fulfill those, with God's help.

That's what Jesus gives the disciples – and us - in this fishing scene. He sees opportunities where they think there are none; and he sees them as capable of caring for others, when they barely feel able to take care of themselves, not even one fish caught all night.

Jesus sees opportunities. He sees where the fish are in the water, when they can't. He has a different lens, a different angle of sight, a different perspective that they need.

Peter's boat was near shore, we're told, only about 100 yards away and the Sea of Galilee is relatively shallow. The kind of net being used was thrown repeatedly by hand, from a standing position, and then quickly retrieved to catch the fish. It was not a dragnet pulled behind the boat. There are small weights all along the edge of the net, and if tossed by an expert, it lands lightly atop the water, all the weights touching at once, so the fish are not frightened away -- not unlike the perfect arcing, light cast of a fly fisherman, so the "fly" lands as lightly as a real insect would, and fish are attracted, rather than run. Because this was the way of fishing, Jesus being able to see the fish would not require a miracle; it could actually happen. Commentaries I read this week helped me understand this. Often someone standing on the lakeshore, as Jesus was, could have a different perspective on where the schools of fish were swimming, first one direction, then another, in the shallow water. Jesus could see, from the shore, when the man standing in the boat could not, that just on his other side a group of fish was approaching. "Quick, throw the net on the left," he'd cry, and suddenly, a net could be full.

The point of the story: that God sees opportunities where we may not; things about us that we are just too close to notice.

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How do you see yourself today?

Maybe it's the way Peter saw himself after Jesus' death – as not really lovable, as suspect somehow – that feeling that if people really knew us, and what we'd done, we'd be unmasked. We might look like good church folk while we're here, but in truth, we fumble and fail, even finding little ways to deny Jesus, as

surely as Peter did. I have a friend who went to church for years before she'd tell people that's where she was on Sunday mornings. She'd just demur that she wasn't free for brunch until 12:30. "My friends are all intellectuals," she said, "and I was sure they'd think me crazy."

We know ourselves, so we worry, as Peter did, that we're not capable of what God seems to ask of us, of caring for God's lambs and sheep, in this church or in this city, or in the place where you live. So we go back to our familiar roles in Galilee, the one we've done before like Peter's familiar fishing. No new church roles, we know our limits. Me – run a new program? Me – talk to people I don't know? Me – invite someone to church?

We private New Englanders aren't sure we can turn, and run upstream against the current.

But Jesus stands on the shores of our lives, and sees us with different eyes, as full of possibilities, the way he still saw Peter, regardless of Peter's failures and denials. Jesus offers Peter a chance to declare his love three times, not to humiliate Peter into submission – how awful that God would be! No, Jesus offers Peter three chances to declare his love of Jesus because that is the surest way Peter can liberate himself from the shame of his earlier three-fold denial of Christ. "Yes, I love you, I love you, I love you" Peter can say, out loud, before witnesses, and each time Peter says it, Jesus gives him a solemn responsibility, entrusts Peter with a new opportunity to live into his love of God, affirms Peter's ability to do so.

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I'm often Peter myself – it's probably my default position, worried whether I have loved God well enough, and deep down inside, worried whether I am still loved by God. Earlier this week I was explaining why I've found I need to keep coming back to church, week after week, and that's why: if I live from a self-image of not being good enough, it's a hard way to go out into the world. Shame shuts us down, and we can't see possibilities.

So I come back here, week by week by week, to be reminded that I'm loved. To be reminded as frequently, as repetitiously as Peter was, that I am forgiven and still entrusted with loving others, with feeding and tending God's lambs and sheep. You are, too.

But today Peter may not be the one you relate to. For me, too, there are days when I'm not so much plagued with self-doubt, like Peter, but a tad too confident and haughty. Then I act more like Saul in our Lesson from Acts: quite certain of myself and the rightness of my brilliant project, thank you very much! Saul, zealous and determined, convinced that **he** best understood God correctly, and Jesus' followers were infidels, to be persecuted. Saul pursued his mission with a ferocity that left early Christians dead in his wake. That is, until he was given new eyes by God – and a new name, Paul. Saul turned and changed, he started to swim up stream, and became one of the greatest disciples *for* Jesus, once something like “scales” fell from his eyes.

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Of course, at different times, each of us has within us a bit of Peter and a bit of Saul. I'm not sure today where you may need a new perspective, the way of seeing that God gives us, standing there on the shores of our everyday lives. You know best the place where have you been trying, and trying, and trying; where, like the disciples, you are exhausted from fishing all night long with nothing to show for it. Who or what might God be wanting you to see differently now?

Yourself? Others? Church? Your city? Maybe even God – to see God as one of Love and Forgiveness, rather than one whose standards you never can meet? What do all these things look like, when seen through the Lens of Love?

By ourselves, we often keep missing the opportunities, circling right at our feet, under our boats, ones we can't see. But with God, with the Lens of Love – then we can see ourselves, and others, and even God differently. We recognize God, active in our lives, right there at the shore, still entrusting us to care for others, to tend to the needs around us. To feed sheep. To tend lambs.

Because God see us with the Lens of Love, we can go forth from this place to see others through that lens, too.

That's what happens in my movie, [Fly Fishing in the Yemen](#). It's what happens with all good movies – and perhaps will all well lived lives. The characters are open to seeing things differently, from a new perspective, so they change and grow.

May you also, with God's help.
Amen.