

**Sermon Preached  
by Doug King  
Sunday April 25, 2004  
The Third Sunday in Eastertide  
John 21:1-17**

Well, the last of the colored eggs have gone from salad to sandwiches to memories. There is little sign of the brass, timpani, and hoopla of two weeks ago. We are officially in the midst of the Rodney Dangerfield of liturgical seasons, Eastertide. Now Advent certainly gets its share of respect as the great countdown to Christmas. And even Lent does not do too badly in the publicity department as the church journeys to Jerusalem and the cross.

But we rarely give much consideration let alone respect to the notion that the season of Easter extends for six Sundays beyond Easter Sunday itself. During these weeks we are called to celebrate and recognize the risen Christ in our midst. But it is not easy keeping up the euphoria of Easter Sunday week after week. This morning's lesson from the gospel of John suggests that we are not alone in our difficulty. When we join the action the disciples who had been fishermen before Jesus took them on a whirlwind tour of preaching, teaching, healing, miracles, arrest, death, resurrection, and visible after death appearances in their midst, have returned to being fisherman. If after experiencing all of those amazing events first hand they can find nothing better to do than return to business as usual, what can be expected of us in this season? It is hard to keep that festival energy up as the routine of life settles back in to form. It is hard to recognize God in the midst of the ordinary. It is difficult to recognize Jesus while we are tugging on the oars and hauling the nets of our every day existence.

Even when we are doing work for the church for the most part we do not spend too much time connecting the work we do with the presence of God. When we are serving lunch at Loaves and Fishes or Tutoring at the ENERGY After-school program, we are much more comfortable calling ourselves volunteers rather than disciples. We just want to do our small part because it is a good thing to do good things for others

and let's just leave it at that. There is nothing extraordinary to be found in our ordinary efforts. We give a few hours here, lend a hand over there. We are not exactly participants in the resurrection because we paint a few walls at a Habitat House.

But here is the thing, that is exactly who we are, participants in the resurrection, members of the Body of Christ. Our ordinary actions are indeed imbued with the extraordinary. Now obviously, we are not the ones who have defeated death. We do not transform broken-ness into wholeness in any scale or magnitude comparable to the Christ. But we have been given a role to play. As Peter and Jesus talk we hear very clearly how God calls us to demonstrate our love for the divine. Three times Peter is asked about his love for Jesus (the use of three echoing back to his three denials of Jesus during the Passion) and three times he is given instruction on how he can demonstrate the reality of that love, "Feed my sheep, Tend my sheep, Feed my sheep." Peter as the founder of the church is given instructions even he and we can understand about how we show our love for God. We respond to the resurrection of the Christ by playing our own part in mending what is broken in this world.

Well, that all seems easy enough. We might as well sing our closing hymn right now and head upstairs to the reception. But of course it is never that simple. Our daily efforts to take care of ourselves let alone reach out to help others can often seem dry and unrewarding, a mere ameliorating drop in the bucket of human misery and suffering. We all know the feelings of boredom and exhaustion that come with the darkness and the empty net, those times when our labor produces little visible fruit. If you ask me whatever the equation is that divides the time in our lives between drudgery and effort without any greater comprehension, and the moments when our eyes are opened and our efforts are rewarded; well let's just say we could all use to have the balance shifted a bit.

Just give us a glimpse God. Show us if and how all of our efforts and lives are fitting into the great big master plan you have. Now you do have a plan now God, don't you? Yeah, Yeah we are out there trying to feed the sheep, but too often the nets are coming up empty and our hearts are empty. After I graduated from college I did some

mission work in California and Mexico. I worked with political refugees from Central America helping them get into the U.S. and receive political asylum. The days were long and hard and we failed much more often than we succeeded. I did not really have any place to live so I was moving every couple of weeks to somebody else's couch. I had been on the west coast for several months when my birthday rolled around. At the end of a long day I walked down to the cliffs by the ocean and I sat watching the sunset and wondering about what I was doing with my life and what I was going to do with my life and whether I would go to seminary. In the midst of my staring and moping and thinking, this disheveled, most likely homeless woman with a red back pack walks up to me and asks me if I would like to talk. I immediately slipped into my New York City subway mode and politely but firmly said that I was not in the mood for conversation at the moment. As she turned to leave me, she stopped and looked me in the eye and said, "Just remember, Jesus loves you." And walked off.

Perhaps it was not the most subtle theological postulation I would ever hear but it was a moment of divine disclosure for me. I was lifted up and transformed and energized. It is funny, a part of me really wanted that woman to be some sort of angel sent down by God to visit me with a proclamation. Of course several weeks later as I was staring out the window of a bus I spotted the woman walking down the street very human for all to see. It made me wonder if this real ordinary woman had any idea that she had touched my life that day or if any of us realize how often our actions may be speaking for God in ways beyond our comprehension.

I also wondered what had fed this woman to make an offering to me in the midst of a life that looked far from easy. As we hear Jesus sending Peter out into the world to feed others we need to remember the context. Peter is not sent out on an empty stomach. Jesus has just served Peter and the disciples breakfast on the beach. We are not called out into the world to the challenging task of feeding others, without being fed first from our God.

In our quest to be faithful there is a circular nature to the journey of being fed and feeding others. As we continue to explore what our next big audacious goal will be for helping those in need in the city of Buffalo we are evaluating the strengths of this congregation. And obviously there is a long list of strengths that put us in good position to reach boldly out into this city. But perhaps one that may be overlooked is the burgeoning program of our Spiritual life committee and its many classes and experiences which are feeding this congregation. We all need to find a way to be fed by the divine and thus feed others. And on every step of the circle keep our eyes open for glimpses of our God in our midst.

Without a doubt, our faith journeys like all the journeys of our lives include stretches of road that are dry and wearying to our bodies and our souls. But if we seek to feed ourselves as well as feeding others, and keep our eyes peeled for moments of divine disclosure the journey will lead us to places we cannot begin to imagine. When we begin to see the face of God shining through the twelve-year-old from Ferguson Avenue we are tutoring, who knows what will come next? When we recognize that our work collating the newsletter is informing people about opportunities that could transform their lives, who knows what will come next? When we recognize that the most ordinary interactions and tasks of our lives have the potential to be imbued with the extraordinary presence of God, who knows what will come next? Our God has born the task of our mortality and defeated death itself with a love beyond all boundaries, who indeed knows what will come next? Amen.