

An Invitation to Do the “Other” Thing

April 10, 2016 | Rev. Taylor Fuerst

John 21: After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. ² 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. ³ 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.

⁴ Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” They answered him, “No.” ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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.

⁹ When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” ¹¹ 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. ¹² 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. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

¹⁵ 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.” ¹⁶ 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.” ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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.”¹⁹ (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, “Follow me.”

*The Word of God for the People of God. **Thanks be to God.***

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Sometimes, against all common sense, against all good wisdom, God asks us to do the *other* thing.

Peter and his friends had been out there all night. Casting nets. And casting. And casting. And casting. (cast off the left side of the pulpit) They had grown up fishing; it's what they did--they were fishermen.

And again and again, they come up empty. Had they lost their touch? I mean, it's one thing to come back with just a few fish, but none? After these few years of following Jesus, had the fishing just...slipped away from them? What was going on? All night, the same thing--empty nets, as if someone had stolen all of the fish from the sea.

And then, just at dawn, a figure on the beach: "Children, have you caught anything to eat?"
(looking around, at one another)

"N-No."

"Well cast your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some!"
(looking around again...)

"O-ok!"

(side comment) "Sheesh, who does THIS guy think he is? Telling us how to fish."
(move to right side and cast)

And they cast the net one more time, and...well, look at this painting and you can imagine--a huge haul, 153 big, beautiful, shining, wriggling fish.

Sometimes, against all common sense and good wisdom, Jesus asks you to do the *other* thing.

Jesus just doesn't do things in the conventional way, you know? You want teaching from Jesus, he teaches how to break the sabbath and upend the religious law. You want leadership from Jesus, this is how Jesus does it: he gets on his knees and washes feet. You want power from Jesus, this is how Jesus does it: he shows up on a cross. And don't even get me started on resurrection. As Jesus stood on that shore and asked those disciples to cast their nets on the other side, it was an invitation to do the *other* thing. An invitation to submit--to fish, and to

live, in the peculiar way that Jesus asks us to. To do it as Jesus does it, or as Jesus asks them to do it.

And it's not just the fishing; he doesn't stop there. Once they all get on shore, and they enjoy this meal that he has prepared, Jesus has more. "Come on over here, Peter." He takes Peter, who has denied him not once, but three times, and he restores him, three times over. Yes, Lord, I love you. Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. Lord, c'mon, you know everything--you know that I love you! He takes this one who was disgraced and he lifts him up, he makes him the shepherd, the leader of the church. Now, maybe that's not so unexpected, but then Jesus gives Peter a glimpse of what life will be like as a feeder of sheep. "You will stretch out your hands and someone else will tie your belt and lead you where you do not want to go." Peter will be asked to lead the church not in his own way, in his own direction, but in the way of Jesus.

Speaking of leading the church, this week, two of Westbury's own candidates for ministry reached significant milestones in the process of Ordination. Rachel Hodge, whom we as a congregation approved last month in this process, was interviewed by our District Committee on Ministry and she was voted in as a Certified Candidate for Ordained Ministry. This is a significant affirmation of her calling and an important step for her as she finishes her undergraduate degree at U of H and looks ahead toward seminary. And also this week, Hannah Terry, who is serving right now as a mentor for other pastors and church planters on a pilgrimage in England, was approved by the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry to be Ordained as a Deacon next month at the Texas Annual Conference.

So as I read this conversation between Jesus and Peter, I think of Rachel, and Hannah. I think of all of us, clergy and laity, who have been called to lead the church, and how when Jesus calls us to lead he calls us to lead the way to the cross. To lead the way toward death and resurrection. His last words to Peter here, are "Follow me." Go in the way that I go, move in the way that I move, do the things that I show you to do, and very often, that means an invitation to do the **other** thing. To cast the net on the **other** side; to approach this thing the **other** way. Don't do it in the way all the big mega churches do it. Don't do it in the way the church gurus tell you to do it. Maybe even don't do it in the way that they taught you to do it in seminary--lead these people in **my** way. Feed my sheep.

Sometimes Jesus asks us to do the **other** thing, and nobody knew that better than Ananias. Ananias, a follower of Jesus, a disciple, who had heard about Saul. He had heard about this persecutor, this murderer, this man of immense power who was headed for Damascus to do everything he could to stop the followers, the disciples, of Jesus.

So you can imagine Ananias' surprise when God asked him to do the **other** thing. When Jesus said to Ananias, "Ok, right now Ananias, I need you to go to Damascus and find this man from Tarsus named Saul, and I want you to go and give him his sight back." And Ananias is like, "What? Lord, Saul of Tarsus? Do you know who this guy is?? Do you know what he's doing to your people? To the people who love you and are following you?"

You see, I'm convinced that the manuscripts of Acts have been, you know, cleaned up, and sanitized in the language a bit, because surely at this point, Ananias said, "Lord, this is a terrible idea. You have got to be nuts. What will people say? And what if I give him his sight back, and he turns around and kills me for being your disciple? This, O Jesus, this is the epitome of a bad idea." You see, sometimes Jesus asks you to do the *other* thing--the thing that seems ridiculous, and unwise, and unsafe, and contrary to good advice. Sometimes it is ok to say to God, "You've got to be kidding me! You want me to what? Can't you see that this is a bad idea? What are you thinking, Lord?"

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are my ways your ways."

The way of Jesus is often the *other* way. It's the risky way. It's the path of more resistance. It's the costly way.

This week a tragedy occurred at the University of Texas in the mysterious murder of a freshman student. And shortly after the crime came the news of a suspect, a homeless teenager, now in custody. And as the news came out, it came with calls for vengeance, for maximum punishment. Let the punishment match the crime, they said. I am moved to ask, "What are God's thoughts on this?" For God's thoughts are not our thoughts. What was it like for God to be witness to not just one, but two precious lives slipping away in this one heinous act? What are God's ways in the face of such violence, both from the one who committed the crime and those who seek to punish him? What is the *other* thing, the *other* way that God calls us to follow? Could we be called to go *another* way, when we follow a God who takes a murderer like Saul and makes him the linchpin for God's purpose in the world?

Sometimes, against all wisdom, against all common sense, God asks us to do the *other* thing. Because the good news is... God has chosen to do the *other* thing for us. God has looked upon us in all of our brokenness, and God has said, "My way for you will be new life." God has looked on our world and all of its death, and God has said, "My way for you will be resurrection." God has peered into our lives that are so filled with fear, fear of danger, fear of the future, fear of loss, and God has said, "My way for you will be freedom."

This is the God who will lift you up when everyone else is kicking you down. This is the God who will help you to risk when everyone says, "No, be safe!" This is the God who will show you how to give when you think you don't have enough. This is the God who will multiply the food when the sheep are hungry. This is the God who will redeem the worst in us and the worst among us, and show us where true greatness lies. This is the God who meets us on the other side of the cross, on the shore, cooking breakfast, ready to feed us again, ready to send us on a new way.

Let us pray.

Lord, Your ways are not our ways. But we want them to be. We want to choose your way of life over this way of death. We want to choose your way of freedom rather than our way of fear. We want to choose your way of love rather than our way of apathy. But we need your grace to do it. Help us, Lord, to see the way, the path that you are opening before each of us, in our career choices, in our retirement, in our friendships, in our marriages, with our money, in our thoughts. Help us to see past common sense to see your sense, and give us the courage to follow you. Have thine own way, Lord, and may it be for the salvation of this world. In the name of Jesus, the way, the truth, and the life. Amen.

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