Third Sunday of Easter 2022

John 21: 1-19

What a joyous time the gospel invites us into. Despite our topsy-turvy world if offers hope and promise. What a wonderful time to bring young Max for baptism. To give him the gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift of a life-time.

Today we have the story of a beach barbeque. Thus far our Easter the stories include the women visiting the tomb to anoint Jesus body, only to be confronted by a stone rolled away. The two men in dazzling white asking why the women are looking for the living among the dead? He is risen they say. He is going ahead of you to Galilee.

Last week we heard of Jesus appearing in the upper room with a gift for those gathered there. His words are: “pace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you”. He breathes on them and says receive the Holy Spirit.

We can think on these episodes as the in-breaking of Jesus as grieving and desolate people go about their usual work**.** Perhaps Jesus’ friends in the upper room for a meal. Perhaps the disciples went looking for support, to unburden themselves and de-brief all that had happened around the crucifixion. Jesus appears.

At the tomb the women took up their customary duties associated with a bereavement. They knew what they had to do. I wonder what sense of fear, dread and sadness they felt as they approached the tomb. Jesus appears.

In today’s gospel the disciples have gone fishing. This was the work that they knew well. Was this a time to grasp for routine, to re-establish the rhythm of life. I wonder if the purpose was to distract themselves from their pain and disappointment? No fish are caught. Jesus appears.

I want to pick up the theme that I explored on Good Friday. That is that that Jesus **with** us. A subtle shift in theological insight concerning the crucifixion. The emphasis is changed from what Jesus did **for** us.

Jesus’ death on the cross was a demonstration of love. The Resurrection stories I have just mentioned can all be seen as the visitation of love. Love in unexpected places; at a place of burial, in an upper room, on a beach. What does this wonderful story of the beach barbeque have to teach us?

Jesus can and does break into lives in the most unexpected times and places. While we intellectually know that God is always with us, the sudden appearance of the Spirit can catch us off-guard. The truth is that in the hum-drum dreariness of life, we can lose focus on this possibility of the visitation of the Spirit. It is possible for us tobecome fearful and deeply aware of God’s absence**.** Today’s gospel story tells us that the good purposes of God are always around us. When we are not catching fish; when nothing seems to be going right, we need to strain our eyes to see the presence of God and to hear his call.

Jesus called to the men in the boat. You have no fish have you? Peter looks up and there is a moment of recognition. He covers himself because he had been in a state of undress in the boat. He jumps into the water to get to the beach quickly. Does he cover himself in a gesture of hiding? What a remarkable moment of tension! The net is bursting with fish. Perhaps Peter was bursting as well. Bursting with shame and regret! At this moment of bounty and abundance, Peter is desperate to get to Jesus. Perhaps the struggle to cover himself and to get to the beach has both physical and emotional aspect.

Then comes a conversation and gesture that you know. Jesus gives those **gathered the bread and fish**. Generosity and abundance come first. Then Jesus asks Peter three times a focused question. Do you love me? These three questions mirror the three denials Peter made before the cock crowed.

Forgiveness is added to abundance. Peter’s reaction in his customary style was impetuous frustration. You know that I love you! He replies. Jesus gives Peter a very clear directive “Feed my sheep”. Then the conversation ends on a positive theme characteristic of John’s gospel. That is the glorious purpose of God. Jesus says “Follow me.”

So on this day when we welcome Max into the fellowship of the Holy Spirit we are all reminded of the abundance that is open to us as we live into our baptismal promises. For some of us it has been some time since we made the promises were made by Godparents. Or perhaps we made promises on our own behalf. Living into our baptism is an hourly proposition. If we trust in God’s presence, the manner in which we experience each hour can literally change. Are you stressed, or angry or despondent? Focusing on God who is a Trinity of persons in the moment can lift us up and heal us.

This is the gift of baptism. We are made one with Christ in his death and resurrection. Max won’t know his world has changed but the in-dwelling Spirit will be with him as a smouldering ember that can be brought to flame as he learns to interact with it. May we all respond to the Spirit that dwells within us. May we respond with the urgency that Peter did when he sprang from the boat. May we listen to Jesus’ words that are spoken as surely to us now as they were on that beach long ago. “Follow me”!

AMEN