

Last week we read in John's gospel about how Jesus breathed on the disciples and sent them out. Then the text concludes with

*"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name."*

It sounds like we should be at the end of the book. John's wrapping it up, and we're all ready to say AMEN! when we get this next story.

It's kind of like sermons that you can just feel are being all wrapped up, you're kind of basking in that feeling of how it's the perfect length—you're still awake—and then: the preacher keeps going.

Not that that ever happens here.

And so it is with John. "..., and that through believing you may have life in his name." OH—AND .. *"After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way."*

We rejoin John's gospel with a snapshot of 7 disciples. They are back in Galilee, completely unsure about what they're supposed to do and where they're supposed to go. Even after Jesus breathed on them and told them to follow, you can almost hear the disciples asking, "Follow you where?"

So they go home. Isn't that what we all do when we're confused? We go to the place we feel safest.

The disciples have lost their cohesion, broken apart. Now there are only 7 still together. The women no longer enter the story. They seem to be no longer part of the group without Jesus to defend their place there.

So the remaining 7-- go back to work. They go back to the work they had been doing before this 3 year journey with Jesus began. And in this story,

they are struggling: not only with their faith, but with their fishing. Frustrated, depressed and unsuccessful with their nets, they hear someone call.

They can't quite see the stranger who is calling them, but they hear him. And he is even telling them how to do their work: "Perhaps your nets are on the wrong side of the boat. Try the other side."

The stranger has their attention now. The disciples are now listening a little harder—surely it must be coincidence that this stranger is saying what Jesus had once said to them— but they do as he suggests and throw the nets to the other side of the boat. And it is immediately filled with fish.

Could it really be that again Jesus has come in a guise they don't recognize?

What is really interesting about these post resurrection stories is that Jesus is never recognized by how he *looks*- but always by his *actions*--what he says or does.

I don't think this is an accident. I think this is exactly what the gospel writers are trying to tell us. Christ will manifest himself all around us, but we won't recognize Christ by how a person looks, but by words they say, or by love in action.

This is a lesson for us. Christ is all around us.

In fact, isn't it often true that the people who look to us—at least visually—the *least* like we would expect Christ to look—isn't it often these unlikely people that surprise us when they echo Jesus to us in ways that make us sit up and take notice?

And so the disciples realize they are again in the presence of Jesus, and he asks, "'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?'"

And we all ask—"These WHAT?"

For many reasons—which I won't parce out here--- biblical scholars believe that the “these” to which Jesus is referring are Peter's boats and nets.

What Jesus seems to be asking is “Peter, do you love me enough to leave your past – your way of life, your fishing—everything ---behind? Do you love me enough to follow me into a new future?”

It often feels safer to do what we've always done, rather than letting Jesus' teaching about loving everyone change us fundamentally through and through.

Is the safety of Peter's former life, more important than what he learned from Jesus? Will he merely see what he learned about healing, and loving and respecting even those most vilified in society-- as a “nice” thing that happened?

Or did it change his life?

And will we let it change ours?

Once we've learned that every being on this earth has intrinsic worth, it hard to go back to treating people as if they are not as important as we are.

And while it is wonderful when people then and now can believe in and love Jesus even if we haven't seen him—Jesus asks one final question—and it's an important one.

“Do you love me? Do you love me more than the other things in your life that mean so much to you? Then help and care for all people.”

Take care of the vulnerable people. Turn your love for me into love for each other. For all others. I am in them, and they are in me. Love me, love my people. And you will see my face everywhere.

“Do you love me?” Jesus asks us. “Tend my sheep.” Amen.