

Stewardship is Generosity
John 21:1-12
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
October 13, 2019
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For those of you who have been around church for very long, today's scripture may seem like a strange story to hear this time of year. After all, this is a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus. It's a story that typically shows up shortly after Easter among those other stories – Jesus appearing to the women at the tomb, Jesus visiting a group of disciples and then later Thomas who hadn't been with them, Jesus walking as a stranger with two followers who were returning home to Emmaus. This is most basically an Easter story.

And that's how we treat it. We talk about Jesus showing himself again to the disciples. We talk about their growing understanding of what it means for him to be risen. We talk about what resurrection really is. We work to align our scientifically trained brains with the proclamation of resurrection. We talk about the disciples' doubt, how that may very well have been what drove them back to fishing. And we talk about Jesus redirecting them, reminding them that they are no longer called to a simple life of fishing but are called to be agents of God's good news. We talk about the power of Jesus that caused them to catch more fish than their net should have been able to hold – the power of Jesus that might just have given them the faith they needed to do his work.

We talk about all of this and rarely do we pay attention to the details around the meal that takes place in this story.

So, let's do that today. After that whole episode happens with unsuccessful fishing and Jesus having them put their nets on the other side when they were already at the point of exhaustion...after they catch a net full of fish...then we hear this, "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.’”¹

Have you ever really paid attention to this part of the story? The gospel writer tells us that Jesus was already cooking. He had the fire going. He already had fish (maybe that’s how he knew the spot to point the disciples toward!). He already had bread. And, let’s be honest - he had been around fishermen long enough to know when they would be coming in from a night of fishing. I don’t know about you, but I picture Jesus as being organized enough that he had the fire going, and the food on and ready at just the right time. In other words – Jesus didn’t need their fish! He was perfectly prepared and capable enough to feed them without them bringing more fish to the fire.

But, he asked for their fish anyway.

Instead of just doing it all on his own...instead of just taking care of things without their investment...he asked *them* to bring some fish to the table.

And this isn’t a new thing. If we look back throughout the stories of the Judeo-Christian tradition, we worship a God who has always been partnering with humanity. While we claim God’s all-powerful nature, God, from the moment of creation when humans were established as caretakers of the earth, has been asking us to partner. God has been asking us, not just to sit back and make suggestions or instruct the divine, but to be agents of change and of love, to be those who carry light into places where shadows have overcome hope, to be forces of wholeness and healing in a broken world.

¹ John 21:9-12a, NRSV.

It kind of makes bringing a few fish to breakfast seem like a small ask, doesn't it?

But what Jesus asked of them was really more than just hauling in an overflowing net and carrying over a little food. In this simple invitation to bring some of their fish, Jesus was affirming that they had something to offer, that the work wasn't his alone, that together they were called to work in this world.

And this is the same invitation we are given. This is really what stewardship is all about. It is the recognition that we continue to have a partnership with the divine. It is the recognition that we are not called to sit back and wait and watch until God does something, but that we are asked to bring our resources to the table and to work together with God in creating the kin-dom.

But why? If we believe in a God who has the power of creation, who can do the impossible, then why do we need to be part of it?

I suspect there are many answers to this, but perhaps at the heart is the reality that we are better when we are invested...when we have responsibility...when we are in relationship and partnership. And, after all, it seems clear that relationship is at the heart of who God is. Whether this is evidenced in the responsibility our stories say the divine shares with humanity, whether this evidenced in the concept of the Trinity – God in three persons, or whether this is evidenced in myriad other ways that God shows up as love and as connection...our faith is rooted in the idea that we are better in community and communion.

And this is certainly true in the church. While there may be names on the bulletin of those who are church staff or those who are in leadership positions on any given day, being church is really up to all of us.

It takes all of us bringing our gifts in order for ministry to happen. Kara may be the staff person identified as working with children and youth, but this fall is a great example of how that

program is bigger than Kara. This fall our JYF group is being led by Steve Dunham and Sara Riggs and we have two Chi Rho/CYF community groups being led by Max & Yury Clark and Martha Hedberg and Rebecca Clark. Creating these safe spaces for kids to come and to be in community and to be loved by God and people is possible because many are bringing their gifts. Laura may be the staff person identified as working with music, but each Sunday our music is led by a rich diversity of voices and instruments from Malinda to John, from Gayle to Carol, from Corinne to Tim, from Lora to Steve, and many others. We could go on with example after example, because if we are paying attention we are reminded so often that this work is our work together.

And it takes all of us discerning together and coming together around a sense of God's vision and mission, in order for us to be a congregation with a sense of identity. Over the years this has been true as we have discerned our commitment to work in affordable housing, as we have discerned whether or not to move to this location, and most recently this is why our leadership didn't just write and adopt a Welcome Statement but instead invited the whole congregation into many conversations so that we could affirm something that we understood together.

And it takes all of us sharing our financial resources in order for anything to happen. Whether it is lights coming on when we flip the switch, the youth going to camp, our shut ins being visited, small groups being planned and led, our building being able to give space to other community groups, our support of the Common Fund, the Coralville Food Pantry, or Heifer project...these and every ministry that happens at and through First Christian needs all of our support.

Day after day, Jesus asks us to bring our fish to the fire...to bring our resources that together we may share in ministry that makes a difference in this world. Day after day we are asked to live with generosity, to remember that what we have is for the good of this world, to share that together we may bring wholeness to a fragmented world.

I now invite you to hear the witness of Diane Hertel as she shares about why First Christian is her church home and the many people who influenced her in generosity. (Play video)