

Sunday May 1 2022 Easter 3 Undercover But New in Christ

Revelation 5: 11-14 John 21:1-19

There are many television dramas which depict every day life in people's homes, hospitals, courtrooms as well as police officers. Specially trained detectives often are given new identities, clothes and they take on the roles of those whom the police are seeking to charge and convict of crimes which involve the death and destruction of many people's lives. For such officers going 'undercover' means living a life that is not like their own for months away from family and the support systems which truly ground them. The officers avoid detection for the purposes of gaining the trust of an individual or organization in order to learn or confirm confidential information, or to gain the trust of targeted individuals to gather information or evidence. These police shows are popular because the main character takes on the role of different criminals in order to bring justice forward. Undercover operations often give the illusion that they are doing wrong but in fact the officers are doing so for the right reason. They work under the cover of a different identity. Two principal problems that can affect such officers is in the maintenance of identity and the second is the reintegration back into normal duty.

While walking on the beach early in the morning- at daybreak-a man yelled out to the fishers in the boat, "Did you catch any fish?" "No" was what they said. The man then told them, "Try putting your net on the other side of the boat!" One can imagine what these fishermen said which was not recorded. What difference will it make putting the net on one side or the other? Who is that guy? Is he trying to be funny? The other side of the boat! Doesn't he know that fish swim under the cover of the boat and cannot fully see the net no matter which side it is on? They might have even said, "No, we're tired, done for the night and going home." Or facing the fact that they had nothing to sell at the market that morning, "Sure, why not? It can't hurt!"

So they gather the net, and then switched sides of where to throw it out. Within a few minutes, the net was full. They were in awe as they struggled to bring in the large haul of fish. But then John the beloved disciple looked toward the beach after thinking about all the fish in the net. He exclaimed, "It is the Lord!" How had John figured it out that Jesus was the one on the beach? How was it that the disciples didn't recognize him before the nets were full?

John looked at the large number of fish and then recognized Jesus. Was this Jesus' plan for the disciples to see him again as the One who performed miracles had done so again? Or was Jesus intentionally not revealing himself to them in order that they might know and believe again that he had truly risen from death? Was Jesus undercover in those minutes on the beach? That

is why didn't the disciples recognize him? Or were the disciples so tired they did not pay attention because they did not expect him?

The disciples had gathered by the Sea of Tiberias and they were uncertain as to what to do. Their lives had been turned upside down by Jesus. They had followed him as he taught and preached and healed for 3 years. They knew that he was put to death and they had seen him alive. And so now as they gathered on the beach, they were not sure what to do. Peter made a declaration of what he was going to do. He needed to do something and as a fisherman he decided to do something familiar and profitable. He went fishing. The others present were also unsure of what to do after their Master had risen from death. So they went with Peter into the boat and stayed out all night fishing.

They went fishing because it was familiar. When they had last seen Jesus, they had not been told their specific task or what would happen. So they went back to their old job, maybe to relax reconnect and even to reassess what they would do.

After John recognized Jesus, he shouted, "It is the Lord." Peter heard him then turned to see the man on the beach, got dressed and jumped into the water. He made his way to the shore where a small fire was going. Jesus was cooking fish on it and asked them to bring more. Besides the fish, were some loaves of bread. The disciples then brought the 153 fish to shore. Why this number? It is a question that mathematicians have pondered for years. One of the things about this number is that if you add  $1+2+3+4$  all the way up to and adding  $+17$  you will get 153. There are other speculations but what is significant is that before the stranger on the beach told them to put their nets on the other side of the boat, they had caught nothing.

When the disciples came to the beach, they knew who Jesus was they recognized him. He was no longer hidden; they ate together. Jesus then pulls Simon Peter aside and asked him three times whether he loved him. Simon Peter answered yes; yet Jesus responses were similar yet differed too. 1) Feed my lambs. 2) Tend my sheep; 3) Feed my sheep. Why three times? Because Peter had denied him three times and now Jesus was checking with him where his loyalties laid. Jesus was preparing Simon Peter for the largest task ahead- to take charge after Jesus would ascend into heaven and he had to be sure.

But Peter answered yes each time. And then Jesus said, "Follow me" The same instructions Jesus had given three years before when he first called them. Follow me.

Who was Peter speaking with? The disciples recognized him when they got closer to the shore. John had called him by name. Was it because of the large catch of fish and Jesus had made that possible? Or was it because Jesus revealed himself in the way they could truly see and know him?

As we consider our world today, there is a lot of uncertainty and often a cautious approach is taken when making decisions for life and the path one takes. But when we consider what Jesus did in this story of reconnecting with his closest followers and particularly Peter, we need to realize that there was a test of faith and a sense of what am I going to do next.

Peter knew the life of a fisherman and he led the disciples back to the boat to fish. When they caught nothing, they were discouraged, but because a stranger (they did not know it was Jesus) said try the other side, they did; they had nothing to lose. Their future was uncertain, their master was alive but no plan was put in place as to what they were going to do next or when. But Jesus tested their willingness to try something different. And they succeeded. Peter saw Jesus, and knew that Jesus had come to them for a reason. The reason was to prepare them for what would happen after He returned to heaven. Peter was further tested through reconciliation with Jesus after his denials.

Today we are searching for meaning for our lives in this post pandemic; post Christian era because Jesus' story is not known by everyone yet our world focuses on the cycles of life, and people of faith are living and looking for hope. And they are uncovering this hope because of Jesus' followers who believe in what he taught and did for the sake of others. His message of loving others is a universal message of hope. But what is happening today in our world, is not love, but of power and control. How do we faithfully change this? We must first recognize Jesus not as the stranger on the shore who suggested we change up our faith practices, but the One who transforms us because of our faith.

Jesus is the one who seeks us and calls us to serve him. Jesus is the one who is still offering that breakfast on the beach—a time of communion and thanksgiving, A time of forgiveness and reconciliation so that we will know what to do if we truly want to follow him. We are called to take off those things which hide our faith and to truly be transformed by Him. For if we are we will one day experience the amazing joy of knowing Christ Jesus as lord for He is the Lamb who was slain. He is the One who died in our place so that we might be forgiven and free to live again. For as we read in Revelation 5 Worthy is Christ to receive power, wealth

wisdom and might, honor and glory and blessing. For Jesus is the One who transforms our lives if we but believe. He still calls us to Feed his sheep, to tend his lambs and to feed one another His lifegiving food for the ages to come.. This spiritual food is love which changes and challenges us all.

Let us remember this as we seek to hide our faith; or seek a different way to live following Christ's teachings. Let us remember this as Jesus and do what he told Peter—Follow me, have faith and feed my sheep.

#### PRAYER

Jesus our Risen Saviour, you call us to follow; here we are. Our faith is in you. Show us your way; teach us the path upon which to walk and lead us where you would have us go. This day and always. AMEN>