

Fish Story -- Easter 3C

Too many mornings, waking and pretending to be with you, wishing that the room may be filled with you, morning to morning, turning into days, all that time wasted merely passing through, time I could have spent, being so content, wasting time with you.

The great American songwriter Stephen Sondheim – think Gypsy; think West Side Story – wrote *Too Many Mornings* for a pair of lovers to sing in the musical *Follies*, but like so much great music, the song has a natural and fundamental connection to the deepest, most emotional and spiritual parts of us. If you wonder what I’m talking about, consider how close the Gospel tradition is to Rhythm and Blues, or how thoroughly engineering and craftsmanship must blend with creativity and holiness to make great sacred spaces like Notre Dame. The realms of art and faith are inextricably intertwined.

So Sondheim’s song about spending too many mornings out of kilter, or unconnected, or wasting time by being apart from what one loves does not just apply to a particular romantic attachment, it applies easily to life, specifically a life of faith. Each day, each moment we can ask ourselves, “Am I in the moment? Am I aware of the presence of love? Or not?”

Last Sunday we read together the end – or at least it seemed like the end – of John’s magnificent, mystical and ok manipulative Gospel. We came to a place where it said “Now Jesus did many other things besides those written in

this book; but these are written that you may believe that he is the Christ, the child of God, and that believing, you may have life in Jesus' name." That sounds like a beautiful and perfect ending. You can almost hear James Earl Jones rolling out "...you may have life in Jesus' name," as the credits roll, or see Walter Cronkite turn towards the camera to say, "And that's the way it is, Sunday, May the 5th, 2019, Good Night."

So what is today's extra installment for, this fish story, followed by one more shepherd metaphor? Why do we need to start in with more episodes? Once John Wayne rides into the sunset, once the game is over; once Jesus convinces Thomas, what more is there to say? This is where Sondheim comes in. This morning on the Sea of Galilee is one that ought to be different for the disciples. Instead of being different, it starts out as one of the too many they spend in frustration, reaching, straining and aching unnecessarily. For the disciples, indeed for each and every one of us, life is a succession of days wherein we too often long for what we already possess. They can't be blamed for going back to fishing, after all, they were fishermen.

And fishing can be pretty distracting. Not just the pleasurable kind, but the kind that one does to make a living. I was talking with a friend – a fisherman -- on Friday night at the theater here. He had a bout with cancer a few years back and recently got some followup x-rays that alarmed the radiologist. That is until the fisherman explained that it was ok, just scarring; every rib had been broken at least once during his working life at sea. But still,

having lived in the presence of God's very self, these fisherfolk had to feel the change that had come over them; they had to know things were different. Too many mornings of wishing and pretending for something more, something more, something other, add up to wasted lives; they had to know fulfillment and accept the sense of purpose it brings.

Ever the gentle teacher, Jesus speaks some friendly advice, that ends up seeming like a miracle: he merely reminds them to try the other side of the boat. Now we left-handers take a little offense that we're known as the sinister ones, the gauche ones and, in this story it's implied that the left side of the boat was the wrong side of the boat, but the wisdom is in the simile and we aren't here to rewrite it. The point is that Jesus reminds them that they are forgetting their new selves; they are forgetting to see things differently than they ever saw them before they knew him. There is a whole new dimension to their being that has come about and will continue to exist and may thrive despite Jesus being physically gone. Once you know and love this story, it becomes your story too – permanently.

Any self-respecting fisherman knows to try both sides of the boat, but somehow these fellows forget, and so he comes back and reminds them: they have the ability, thanks to their experience with Jesus, to look at life from both sides now, but they're too used to spending their mornings the old way.

We too must stay alive and awake and aware of the goodness and wonder of God's grace. We are all in the habit of treating each new day as a challenge we have to meet instead of as an opportunity to experience the loving power of the risen Christ. Of course we cannot pretend or realistically hope that our best moments, our most fulfilled times of faith and love will ever be just continuous. So we spend too many mornings wary, a little skeptical, guarded and determined to prevail, whatever the cost.

Jesus is reminding the disciples, and us that every morning is an opportunity to open our eyes and say thank you for the wonder of faith, for the presence of hope, even when dark and difficult times arise, because it is still Easter; it is still Easter and it always will be, if only we orient ourselves to the East of it, where sometimes Left is right. We are still being cared for and loved. We always have this nother side of the boat from which to fish.

All our many mornings, mornings to mornings turning into days and years can be ones of contentedness and purpose if we carry this image with us: Jesus gently suggesting we try another way, Jesus happily with us as we barbecue fish on the beach, Jesus gently reminding us time after time after time that our job is to feed one another.

The passage we heard from Revelation tells us, "Worthy is the lamb!" If we are, each one of us, lambs of the flock of God we are, each one of us worthy, capable of remembering, appreciating, and embodying the saving power of Christ, in big ways or tiny ones; we are worthy.

So it is that when we look on one another person, we see two creatures, or at least two natures in each of us creatures: a fellow lamb in need of feeding, and a potential rocker of our world. Unless we remind ourselves of these truths at each day's dawning, too many of our mornings will be wasted, and too many of our evenings will be spent wondering if we missed a chance to meet Jesus that day.

This extra installment, tacked onto the end of John's Gospel is the Evangelist's way of bringing us back down to Earth, of letting us know that the presence of Christ in our lives is a permanent possibility. John writes this epilogue to the Jesus story to remind us we must look for an angle or attitude in every situation that acknowledges, enjoys and employs the new people we are, now that we know that death is not the final word. The only way to do this is by the morning to morning acknowledgement to ourselves, to God, and to the others on our path, that we fully expect we just might meet Jesus today on the beach.