

Easter C 3, 2007
John 21: 1-19
The Rev. Ronald N. Johnson

During the Sundays immediately following Easter, the church focuses on gospel accounts of our Lord's post-resurrection appearances. Today's gospel reading is such a story. But today, we are dealing with Saint John the Evangelist, and John's Gospel is a gospel with a difference. John was very much taken up with symbols and symbolism, and was sometimes inclined to force the story, in order to make the symbols carry his meaning. We have such a thing here, in this story about "fishing for breakfast."

Let me unpack this a bit. The disciples had been fishing without luck. By inference, the fishing nets were set on the boat's port side, because Jesus instructed them to put the nets on the right side. What difference could this make? The boat was not so wide that you would miss a school of fish. But in our Lord's time right and left carried moral meaning. "Right" was good and "left" was bad. John was telling his readers that following Jesus is to be on the "good" side of God, the "righteous" side, if you like a play on words. By the way, "sinister" derives from the Latin word for left, so you can see how this "right" / "left" thing plays out, even in our modern language. The bottom line was that being on Jesus' side is being on the right side, the side of the justice, righteousness and mercy, the side of faith and hope and the side of love.

John's reporting a very detailed count of the number of fish in the net is quite strange and the "precision" defies reason, but John tells us that there were exactly one hundred and fifty-three fish in the catch. In our Lord's day, people believed that there were exactly one hundred and fifty-three species of fish in the sea. What was John's symbolic meaning? With Jesus, everyone is included, no one is left out. My choice of words, here is intentional, "left out;" I mean "excluded," yes, but I also mean that with Jesus, you are always on the righteous side, in every thing you do. John presented also, in this story, an implicit symbol of abundance. There was much more than enough fish in this catch to meet the needs of everyone. Symbolically, this tells us that faith in Jesus is all sufficient. In faith, nothing is impossible. In faith, we find our hope, our strength and our courage. In faith, even in the midst of unimaginable grief and suffering, we are able to hope.

So, the message that we need to hear, today, the word that must find a dwelling place in us all, is that Jesus heals all wounds and God's love, manifested in his gift of his son – our Lord's death and resurrection – is sufficient for all our needs, and not just ours, individually, but for the needs of all humanity, even all creation. And what does God require of us? Only that we love the Lord our God with all our being and that we love our neighbors as we love ourselves. If we do this, we are on the right side of God. *Amen.*