



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

THE REV. CANON NANCY ROSS, CANON FOR CATHEDRAL RELATIONS
THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER, MAY 5, 2019
ACTS 9:1-20; PSALM 30: 1-6, 12-13; REVELATIONS 5:11-14; JOHN 21:1-19

USE THE FORCE

If you are a Star Wars geek, you know that yesterday was May the Fourth. Not the fourth of May, but May the Fourth, as in “May the Fourth be with you.”

“May the Force be with you” is, after all, the well-known blessing language of the Star Wars universe. And when we first encountered that universe, long long ago in a galaxy far far away, their universe had all but forgotten about the Jedi masters who could do powerful things with their alignment with the Force. And the rest is movie history, right?

And, of course, lots of our movie history mirrors our mythology of heroes and journeys, builds on and off of our religious stories.

But “May the Force be with you” is a *blessing*. May the power that undergirds the universe flow through you, give you strength to do uncanny things, to do powerful good.

A Star Wars Jedi master would make a small hand gesture and say a few words – and the person would repeat the words and do what the master had said. That famous Jedi mind trick worked on me once, when, waiting in line at Carvel with my adolescent son to get him an ice cream cone, we stood next to a poster of a banana split, and Patrick waved his hand across the poster, looked me in the eye, and said in his most earnest Jedi voice, “You DO want to buy Pat a banana split.” It was so cute, I laughed out loud, and had to concede: “Ok, Patman, I DO want to buy Pat a banana split.” And I did.

Now I’m not calling that an example of “powerful good” exactly... but what WAS ignited was the force of how I loved him, and his clever, cheeky way.

May the Force of love be with you. Now that’s a blessing ...well beyond ice cream.

Simon, son of John, do you love me?

Simon, son of John, do you love me?

Simon, son of John, do you love me?

Lord, you KNOW that I love you.

Lord, you KNOW that I love you.

Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.

Feed my lambs.

Tend my sheep.

Feed my sheep.

If you feel the force of this love, GO DO SOMETHING.

And this is indeed a powerful love force, this love of Simon Peter for Jesus. Jesus, awkwardly, we might feel, asks Peter to confirm THREE times that he loves Jesus. Peter's feelings are hurt, even. But three is a number of completeness in the Bible, used hundreds of times – and we know Peter denied Jesus three times, and now he is COMPLETELY restored, with three affirmations of his love.

The risen Christ knows that Peter loves him. But he also knows that much is going to be expected of, and taken from, Peter. Jesus' command to Follow me and feed my sheep is going to take a complete person, a healed person, a person who is re-commissioned for what is being asked of him. It's not going to be easy, and it's going to end harshly, Jesus straight up tells him. Peter couldn't carry forth fully weighed down by his three denials of Jesus before the cock crowed. He needed to be restored in his own heart, with the completeness of three affirmations: Yes, Lord. You know I love you.

That is the blessing that will carry Peter forward, Peter as the rock, the leader of The Way, this infant movement of followers of Jesus. And he needed such a blessing. Remember, in this Gospel of John, Peter has already seen the risen Christ, has been in the room when Jesus stood among them and said, "Peace be with you" and breathed on them; he was there when Jesus told Thomas to "reach out your hand and put it in my side."

But this day, Peter is perhaps at loose ends. For three years he had been following Jesus, literally, physically, going around with Jesus. And now, Jesus isn't there. Yes, it's incredible that Jesus is risen, and he believes it, and the Spirit is fluttering in their hearts, but... now what? Now, where the rubber hits the road – now what? And so, maybe Peter doesn't really know the answer to that.

I know that "NOW WHAT" is a question I often don't have an answer to. When life changes drastically, NOW WHAT? How do I get out of bed? How do I go back to work? How do I do this thing on my own? How do I forgive myself? How do I find the energy to live into this new reality? NOW WHAT?

So what does Peter do with the now? He goes back to fishing – to his old, familiar ways, to what he used to know. And guess what? It's not satisfying! They catch diddly-squat. Is that really surprising? Once you've encountered Jesus, the old way doesn't have the same force of love for you. Sure, the old way is familiar, and it's always tempting to rest in what's familiar. But if you try to just

go back, it's not the same, it's not enough. I feel for Peter in this telling in John's Gospel. He has denied Jesus three times. He has lost his beloved leader. And even though he has experienced a rebirth, a wonder, he's not fully confident or ready to live into the new life yet. Maybe Peter is burdened by his denials; maybe he feels guilty and ashamed; maybe he's scared and feels inadequate to be the rock for Jesus to build on. *Now what?*

And so what does Jesus do about that? He comes to them and he feeds them. He tells Peter where to catch the fish – not the first time that has happened -- and he feeds them – also not the first time that has happened, right? *This is Eucharist.* When you are fed by Jesus, you are nourished for new life in Jesus.

If you think you're not up for it, not the right person for it, think again. Jesus has Peter think again three times. Do you love me? Yes. Do you love me? Yes. Do you love me? Yes. The three denials are old news. Restoration is given. There is abundant, overflowing grace. The force of love is reignited, and the force of love is what matters. Jesus doesn't hold onto old failures. Jesus always invites in love, says: Follow me. GO FEED MY SHEEP.

That's what Jesus and Peter are really talking about on the shore this day: the very nature of being disciples. If you love me, share that with the world. That's what it means to follow me! That love is both personal AND

communal. It is both heart AND action. If you love me, Jesus says, then take it out and live it. THAT's discipleship, on this side of Easter. That's "what now!"

If you've ever wished you had the Force, consider this: You DO. The force is strong with this community, here at Saint Mark's, absolutely: in this worship, in myriad outreach ministries, in the way people show up for each other. But the whole human family, though we haven't fully grasped it, is loved in the grace of the new reality of life through the risen Jesus. And so we are all called to active discipleship – despite our own doubts about our abilities, our wavering in faithfulness.

A meal with Jesus leads to going out and feeding others. With food, or with clothing, with money, with hands-on labor, with standing up outside court houses, or with sanctuary, with first and last month's rent for someone who's been homeless, with casseroles, with calls to your legislators, with prayer, with invitations to someone who is lonely, with showing up and listening, with service... Feed my sheep.

Yeah, we still find ourselves fishing from the wrong side of the boat sometimes, wondering, NOW WHAT? But every time, Jesus is here to feed us, and to remind us: Feed my sheep.

That's what.

John 21:1-19 [Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

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." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."]



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