

Sermon Preached on  
Third Sunday of Easter  
(April 10, 2016)  
"Fishy Stories"

I never liked fishing. About the only experience I had of it as a child consisted of going out with my grandpa on his little boat on a lake in Indiana where he'd drink a couple of beers and smoke his cigars, and we'd hold our rods waiting for something to happen. When we got back home, he'd tell grandma, "Oh yeah, we caught some nice crappies, but we let them go." My conclusion was that fishing was boring and required a little creative story telling.

I think I may have ruined fishing for the nursery school kids this week for much the same reasons. I read them a child-appropriate version of this story, and - well, how do you make "they fished all night without catching anything" interesting? They liked the part about Jesus and the full nets, but as one of the little boys said, "That never happened to me and my dad."

You have to admit, if Jesus weren't involved, this would be a tough fish story to swallow. Just about as hard to believe as Paul's story on the road to Damascus. This guy who hates the followers of Christ (they weren't called Christians yet) is hit by a bright light, talks to Jesus, is blinded for three days, and after something like scales fall off his eyes, he's converted.

Kind of wild stories, and maybe they are a little fishy. But in neither of them is the fish - or the scales - the point. In the gospel, Jesus tells Peter to "feed my sheep," and to "follow me." In Acts, Paul isn't sent on his way once he's healed but is given a commission to go and preach the good news of Christ.

The point of each of these stories isn't the wild parts but the deeper truth: that Jesus' story goes on. It does not end. And we are invited to be part of it. This is important because in those early days, nobody knew of the story would continue. Sure, the disciples had seen the risen Christ, but there was unfinished business, and it was not clear that they wouldn't all just disband. The unfinished business centered on Peter who was probably the oldest of the disciples and had openly denied Jesus three times the night he was arrested. It's no accident that Jesus asks him three times, "Do you love me," and tells him three times "Feed my sheep," (which is really mixing metaphors on a fishing trip).

Nobody knew if the whole enterprise would collapse after Jesus ascended, no longer there to guide them. That's why he appeared at least three times - because telling anybody something just once is almost never enough. Even if it's a powerful experience, we usually need reinforcement to make it sink in.

Of course, with Paul, it was different. He had always been zealous in his faith - he just needed his zeal redirected in a positive direction.

Had he not been redirected, had he not had this singular experience, Paul could have spelled the end of Christianity in Israel. He was so anxious to destroy the movement that he wouldn't rest until all were in jail or dead.

But he was changed - and whether or not things happened exactly as described, his entire life took a new direction, and because of that, the story of Christ not only continued but spread across the world.

It might be worth mentioning that each of these stories focuses on one disciple. The gospel, even though all the apostles are present, centers on Peter who is seen as their unofficial leader. Acts centers on Paul, the leader of the fight against Jesus. Each of them requires a fantastic experience, a fantastic story even, to put them on the course that would best serve Christ.

What story do you require?

Do you need to be thrown from your proverbial horse and blinded? Do you need to spend the night fishing only to have some stranger point out what you've been doing wrong? Do you need some other fantastic story to help you see God at work all around you? Or is hearing the witness of not only Peter and Paul but countless others through the centuries enough?

I really don't know what will be enough for each one of us to embrace the risen Christ and share the good news of his love for us all. But I can say this: Jesus' story goes on. It continues today and throughout time - all you need to decide is if you want to be part of it. Amen.