

Third Sunday of Easter - C

“I am going fishing” is not something anyone has ever heard me say. Not my thing. For me, going fishing is about like gambling at a casino—total waste of time.

When I was first ordained, my pastor, Terry Rasmussen, would sometime take the afternoon off and say, “I’m going fishing.” For him, that meant putting a line in the water and spending some time in prayer and reflection. I never saw any fish. Apparently, that was not what it was about.

When Peter says, “I am going fishing” in today’s Gospel it means something totally different. Fishing had been his way of life.

Before Jesus had called him on that day on the Sea of Galilee it was what directed his daily activity, and gave him a place in the larger society

And then everything changed. He had been called, had seen Jesus proclaim the good news with power, heal the sick, give sight to the blind, and proclaim liberty to captives.

Jesus had fulfilled all that had been foretold by the prophets about the promised Messiah.

To those who followed him He had given hope that a new age was dawning.

And then the entrenched power of the status quo had caught up to him, crucified him and thought the matter over.

The disciples were cast adrift. Peter’s idea was to go back to the old ways. Without Jesus the only thing he knew to do was to go back to what he had done before.

Other disciples went with him. They had no other prospects.

As the story unfolds, however, it becomes clear that there is no going back. The night of fishing has produced nothing.

Jesus had promised he would make them all fishers of men, and so, for Peter “going fishing” could only mean that from now on. Fishing for fish would just not work for them anymore.

The disciples were stuck. They couldn’t go back, but without Jesus they could not go forward, either.

It’s interesting that the first people Jesus called were fishermen. Fishing is unique in that, when you see the surface of a lake or sea, it’s not apparent that fish are present.

Fishing can stand for how other things hidden in the depths become visible. Like the presence of fish in a lake, the

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spiritual is a present yet unseen reality.

What is immediately available to the senses does not tell the whole story.

There are times when a deeper reality makes itself present.

Jesus calls out to the disciples and directs them to cast their nets to the other side. Following his lead the disciples discover a treasure trove of fish that had been hidden beneath the surface of the water.

The fish had always been there, present but unseen. Now they are revealed.

When we think about our own spiritual lives, “catching fish” translates into bringing the spiritual depths of our lives into the light of awareness.

Peter’s statement “I am going fishing” was a breaking off from the mission Jesus had given him to be a fisher of men. It would take Jesus to resurrect the mission as well.

Without Jesus’ intervention we would not be here. By meeting Peter and the others where they were, with an unheard of catch of fish, the disciples are reminded of how miraculous Jesus’ presence among them had been. And all of a sudden, there it was again.

They did not need to ask who it was calling to them from the shore. The event had all the markings of the presence of Jesus.

You might say Jesus had to “recatch” his disciples. They were like fish which had wriggling out of the bucket in the boat and back into the water, back into the depths of spiritual darkness.

They were not having any luck, either; with fishing or in their lives in general, because they were being lead by some other impulse than the spirit of Jesus and the call of the Gospel.

We cannot follow God by force of will, or by even following the rules and regulations of our faith. The first thing necessary is to allow the Spirit of the Lord to lead us. Only then will we know how to apply what we learned in catechism class.

As much as we might want to take charge of things and do something about the brokenness of the world, doing so will always end up with us coming up empty.

It could even make matters worse.

The only way that we can minimize that risk is to refrain from taking matters into our own hands, and making it our first duty to allow ourselves to be caught by God and to follow his lead.

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That means that our prayer has to be primarily about asking God for guidance so that we might do his will.

We have 10 of our youth receiving the sacrament of Confirmation this coming Saturday. That message is what they have been steeping themselves in during the course of their preparation: that to be a force for lasting good in the world, they will have to be practiced at letting the Spirit lead them into the proclamation of the Gospel that is theirs to make.

The same is true for all of us. We all have been called to be fishers of people. The way that that happens is as diverse as we are.

And that will only work if we are allowing ourselves to be lead by the Spirit of Jesus, a living, active presence in the depths of our own hearts.

Like Jesus directing the disciples where to cast their nets, this is the same Spirit who shows us where and how a fruitful mission for the sake of the Kingdom can be undertaken, and gives us the courage and fortitude to be true to it.