

April 21, 2019
John 21: 15-17
First Parish UCC, Brunswick, ME
Mary E. Baard

Freeing the Future

INTRO to SCRIPTURE

Today's story comes from the gospel of John and focuses on the disciple Peter, who with some of the other disciples is gathered at a charcoal fire on the lake shore. The last time we encountered Peter at a charcoal fire was in the courtyard of the chief priest, a few days before.

Jesus had been betrayed by Judas, arrested and taken to Caiaphas' home. Peter had followed in the shadows. However, when someone recognized Peter and outed him as a follower of Jesus he emphatically denied it. No – No – No! I don't even know the man. Recognizing what he had done, Peter went out and wept.

The next day, Jesus was crucified. Peter wept and wept. Nothing made sense. Everything seemed hopeless.

Then on the first day of the week, to everyone's shock and amazement the women found an empty tomb. Jesus is on the loose.

Now, in the story we will hear, the disciples are fishing when the risen Jesus appears to them. When they come ashore and gather around the fire, Jesus gives Peter a chance to change his answer. Three times Peter says, Yes, Yes, Yes. And Jesus responds to him with a great big Yes.

SERMON

Anybody here in second grade? When I was in second grade, I told a friend that I liked a particular boy. She promised she wouldn't tell anybody; but then she did. I found out because someone teased me. I was upset about being teased, but more upset that she had told. I thought she was my friend, but it sure didn't feel that way.

Don't you imagine that Jesus was upset that his friend Peter told people he didn't even know Jesus. It was a dangerous situation, but Peter responded as if Jesus was already dead to him.

Then Jesus was actually dead. The situation had indeed been very scary for there was collusion between Roman authorities, some Jewish leaders, and the disciple Judas Iscariot that brought about the brutality of the cross. They tried to stop God's work in the world. It felt like a dead end.

The cosmos gasped and held its breath. What would happen next? Since humans couldn't deal with the profound goodness of Jesus of Nazareth, maybe God would just give up on us. Maybe God would just turn and walk away.

But amazingly, thankfully, God walked right up to the tomb, and in the darkness of night and through the mystery of resurrection set Jesus loose – to love again.

In the resurrection we see the power of forgiveness. God makes new life possible. That is the miracle of Easter. As the Psalmist says time and time again – *the steadfast love of the Lord endures forever*. And as today's story implies, we are called to share that forgiveness one with another.

As we all know, forgiveness is not easy. It is not a simple exchange of words. It is not usually a one-time event. It is a deep spiritual challenge, requiring some of the hardest spiritual work we will do.

Forgiveness is the practice and process of being open to a new future. That is what God makes possible. When we avoid the work of forgiveness, we are tethered to the brokenness of the past. So, think for a moment about what is holding you to the past. *(pause)*

Hear again Easter's promise:

*freeing the future
from the tethers of the past
forgiveness is now.*

~Mary E. Baard

Easter is the eternal now.

At the lakeshore Jesus offers Peter this grace.

- Jesus frees Peter from the tethers of the past.
- Jesus accepts Peter's three-fold affirmation of love.
- Jesus re-calls Peter to the work of loving people, on God's behalf.

Easter is the eternal now.

Donald Marsh and Richard Avery put it well in their song,

*Ev'ry morning is Easter morning
from now on.*

*Ev'ry day's resurrection day
the past is over and gone.*

*Goodbye guilt, goodbye fear,
good riddance!*

Hello Lord, hello sun!

*I am one of the Easter people,
my new life has begun.*

Welcome to Easter morning!