

John 21
Stewardship 4
Jesus Appears to His Disciples
October 25, 2020
Rev. Kelley L. Becker

The last few weeks, as part of our stewardship sermon series, "Our Money Story," we have spent time prayerfully creating some art together. This week, we will add the last piece to our mandala, here in the fourth ring. The imagery in this portion of the design is inspired by John 21:1-19, the story of Jesus' post resurrection appearance to some of his disciples by the Sea of Tiberius. The fish represent the breakfast of fish and bread Jesus offered his emotionally raw, weary, friends. In this final ring of the mandala, we are reminded that the ways of God can restore our broken hopes and our fractured relationships. The clasped hands call us to restoration that is found in community, as we hold onto one another.

I hope each of you have a 4-inch blue or green pipe cleaner. During this time of prayer, I invite you to slowly shape your pipe cleaner into a heart, like this. As we pray, reflect on the ways in which love, symbolized by the heart, restores us and gives us hope, even when we have made mistakes.

Let us pray:

Holy God,

To restore is to bring back;

So today we bring our hearts back to you, our thoughts back to love, and our prayers back to peace.

We try, but we confess,
it's never been that easy for us.

We flirt with reconciliation and then back away.

We come face-to-face with an opportunity for justice, but get scared. We are offered an opportunity to re-write our story,
but we lose our way.

Bring us back to this moment. Bring us back to your story where human beings extend grace to one another and forgiveness is shared.

Restore us. Bring us back to love. Amen.

Please drop your hearts off at the church this afternoon or tomorrow. Our mandala will be finished this week and we can't wait to show you the completed project!

Sermon

Last week, we reimagined what our collective story could be. Using the story of the widow's offering, we imagined a story in which everyone has a place, where resources are shared and the ones who are most vulnerable are cared for. I asked you to hold onto that new story instead of clinging to the old stories of fear and scarcity so many of us are believing right now. I realize, though, that we can believe the new story, and want be part of writing that story, but still feel kind of stuck here in our old stories.

And that's why needed to take the Alleluias out of the box. Even now, in the angsty days before the election, in the midst of a pandemic, we can celebrate and reflect the God that holds a vision of a new story out in front of us and dwells with us "in the meantime."

"In the meantime" is that time between letting go of the old story and the new story becoming a reality. "In the meantime" is where the healing begins, it's where the hard work happens, and it's where we keep learning to depend on each other and God.

That's where 7 of the disciples found themselves in today's story from the Gospel of John. Jesus had been killed, there had been a delay in his promised return, there was a big hole in their community and the grief was heavy. Their little community was supposed to be a safe place when everything else came crashing down, instead it was a reminder of their loss and their desperation, and in some respects, their failures. Judas had betrayed Jesus; Peter had sworn he had no knowledge of him, and certainly no allegiance to him. Afraid and disenchanted by the humiliating reversal of their plans to overthrow their political enemies, they all scattered, except in John's gospel, the story says John hung around.

And then, as promised, Jesus returned and there was hope again. But, there was no revolution, their political enemies were still in charge and nothing had changed. How long would they wait? In some ways, things were still the same, and in some ways, they were worse. The disciples had to be emotionally wrecked. They needed to do something easy and familiar. So, they went fishing one night.

Nobody was asking them questions. The sound of the waves, the familiar smells, it was all good for their battered souls. Unfortunately, they didn't catch a single fish.

At daybreak, they saw a man standing on the beach. The man was Jesus, but the disciples didn't recognize him. He suggested they let their nets down on the right side of the boat and, when they did, they caught 153 fish. Scholars have a lot to say about what significance 153 might have had in the story, but the fact is, that's a lot of fish. John said to Peter, "Holy Moly, it is the Lord." (my translation) When they brought the fish ashore, Jesus was there, already making them a breakfast of fish and bread. He invited them to have some, taking the bread and giving it to them, and doing the same with the fish. Have you noticed that, when Jesus is around, everyone eats and there is always enough? Have you noticed that, at the table with Jesus, there is a place for everyone, even the ones who make mistakes? Is that why John recognized Jesus? In moments of abundance and grace, God's love is revealed.

This four-week sermon series began with Jesus and his disciples around the Last Supper table, remembering stories, holding out hope for a new economy, one where the ones who are vulnerable are cared for and everyone has enough, one that reflected God's kin-dom and not the emperor's. That hope in a new way of being has within it a vision for what the Church is called to be in our neighborhoods, our communities, our nation, and in the world, not 2000 years ago, but today. As we end the stewardship series, we are right where we started, with disciples gathered, confused around a meal, trying to figure out a way forward, "in the meantime." But there is more to this story.

This is John 21:15-19:

¹⁵ 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." ¹⁶ 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." ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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.”¹⁹ (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, “Follow me.”

Jesus’ specific instructions, “feed my sheep,” and “follow me,” were his answers to the question “What do we do ‘in the meantime?’”

This was not the end of the story, but an invitation to participate in writing the next part of the story. Just as the disciples couldn’t just sit around and wait for a revolution that would never come, we cannot sit around and wait for someone else to fix what is broken in the world. Our old stories of scarcity and holding tight to what is ours don’t work. They have never worked, but we keep trying them in various forms. We see evidence that they don’t work everywhere, in the eyes of our neighbors who are hungry, lonely, and oh so weary, in the fearful rhetoric of politicians, in hateful social media posts, in statistics that tell us that the disparity between the ones with resources and the ones without continues to grow.

We have a choice. We can hold on to our old stories or we can write new ones. I have been suggesting for the last 4 weeks that we write new ones, for ourselves and for the church. We have imagined these stories that would:

Restore dignity and space to the ones who have been left on the outside of economic security;

Restore broken relationships, with our neighbors, ourselves, and with God;

Restore our lives to a healthy balance of work, play, and Sabbath; Restore the place of money in our lives and in the life of the church;

This “in the meantime” work of restoration requires courage and an acknowledgement that our small decisions, our random acts of kindness, and intentional acts and words of love make a difference. What we do, each one of us, matters. You matter.

This week, we started collecting your estimates of giving for 2021. If you have turned yours in, thank you! If you have not submitted your estimate of giving form, either by dropping it off at the church or virtually, will you please do that today? It’s going to take all of us, in big and small ways, to make what we have been imagining for 2021 come to life. I am excited about the year ahead. We are really going to zero in on how we can welcome and connect with members who attend and participate virtually, what we can do to bring people of all stages of life together to have fun and really know one another, and we plan to do some

cool music things too! And I am clinging to the hope that we will be back in our sanctuary at some point in 2021.

You are invited to be part of it, with your presence and by contributing financially.

I will end this morning with a poem, written by Sara Are. It's called "Pocket-Sized Moments."

I wonder if we will know when restoration comes.

Will it feel big and dramatic like a summer rain?

Joyful and overwhelming, like an end-of-war parade? Maybe.

Or will it be small?

Will it be pocket-sized moments, like wishing on stars,

The sun through the curtains, or lightning bugs in the yard? Maybe.

I don't know how God will restore this world,

Just like I don't know how to make the summer rain.

But I do know how to say I'm sorry.

And I do know how to love with all of me.

And I know how to say, "This cup is for you," And I know how to taste grace in grape juice.

So on the off-chance that restoration will be small,

Pocket-sized moments of love for all,

I will bake bread and save a seat for you.

I will say I'm sorry and say I love you too.

I will plant gardens and look for fireflies.

I will say prayers on shooting stars at night.

And when the sun shines through my curtain windows,

Remind me to open them wide.

I would hate to miss God's parade,

These holy ordinary days.

Amen.