

The Third Sunday of Easter, Year C, 2022

John 21:1-14

“More Than Enough”

In the first episode of the Netflix series “Dead to Me,”

we see the developing friendship of two women

who meet at a grief support group

after the untimely deaths of their husbands.

At one point, talking about how grateful they are for their friendship,

Jen says to Judy,

“Thank you...for not being repulsed by my version of grief.”

Just like people, each of the gospels has different versions of the grief

Jesus’s followers experienced after their beloved teacher died.

In the version we heard today from the gospel of John, the disciples have already

seen the resurrected Jesus, not once, but twice...

and yet, they are still grieving and agitated;

they don’t know what to do.

And so, in their agitation and uncertainty,

they go back to what they know — fishing —

the life they knew before Jesus called them to follow him

and changed their lives forever.

But as is often the case, when we have been through a life-changing event,

the things we knew before, things that once brought us  
satisfaction and purpose, are no longer the same  
when we go back to them.

The disciples go back to fishing, but it doesn't work like it used to.

They catch nothing...

...until a stranger on the shore offers some unsolicited advice.

We aren't sure what tips off the disciples to the fact that the stranger is Jesus.

Maybe it's that he asks them to do something ridiculous—  
move their nets to the other side of the boat.

These guys were professional fishermen, they weren't fishing with poles  
that could easily be pulled up and plopped down on the other side.

They were using nets, held under water by weights.

It would take all of them to pull up the nets  
and maneuver them to the other side.

And the other side was probably no more than a few feet away  
from where they had the nets to begin with!

Nevertheless, they did the work and moved the nets...

and almost immediately caught so many fish  
they could barely haul them in.

Maybe that was the clue that made them look again at the man on shore  
— abundance.

From his first miracle of turning water to an abundance of fine wine  
to taking a few loaves and fishes and feeding thousands  
to restoring the sick to perfect health,  
again and again Jesus reveals to us the God who, in John's  
words at the very beginning of this gospel,  
showers his beloved children  
with "grace upon grace,"  
with *more than enough* of what they need.

When they disciples realize the man on shore is Jesus,  
they waste no time getting to him.

Once they are on shore, hauling their huge catch up onto the beach,  
Jesus feeds them, abundantly.

He calls them by the fire, where he has cooked fish and prepared bread.

He gives them food that nourishes their bodies and  
heals their souls.

Years ago, when my grandfather died unexpectedly in Georgia,  
there weren't enough surfaces in my grandparents' house  
to hold all the food people brought us.

I don't remember being hungry, but I do remember eating  
and hoping that somehow all that Southern comfort food –

fried chicken, green bean casserole,  
macaroni and cheese, pound cake –  
hoping that somehow all that food would absorb the grief.  
It didn't, but the love and care it represented from those who brought it  
to the house and handed it to us with words of  
empathy and compassion, that made a difference.  
The dishes that crowded every available surface  
served as a tangible reminder of God's abundant grace  
revealed through the love and care of others.

In spite of their abundant catch, the disciples discover that  
Jesus doesn't *need* what they bring —  
he has already prepared a meal for them  
which is more than enough.  
Nevertheless, he invites them to bring what they have caught,  
to contribute some of their fish to the meal they will share.  
It is as if Jesus is reminding them that, in the midst of their shock  
and confusion and grief,  
they can still **do** something.  
They have something to offer, something that matters,  
something the world needs.  
It is as if Jesus knows that when faced with suffering,

most of us long to do something – anything –  
to make it better.

The sixth century was not a pleasant time to be living in Rome.

The city had suffered a series of invasions.

Its economy was in shambles and a bubonic plague  
had ravaged the city.

And yet, as Craig Barnes reminds us in a recent article,  
this century produced some of the greatest leaders of  
the church, including St. Benedict,  
who wrote rules that monasteries still used today,  
and St. Gregory, who left a monastery to  
become the pope.

One of Pope Gregory's great contributions as a monastic-turned-  
pope was to teach us about the value of prayer in the face  
of the world's suffering.

The monks had learned that praying for the world  
was one of the most important things they could do,  
and they offered their prayers  
fervently and abundantly every day.

Gregory taught that prayer begins with humility, the humility we feel when we  
see what he calls the "agitation of the world" —

all the problems and suffering that we cannot,  
with our own efforts, solve.

This humility leads us to prayer and contemplation,  
through which we discover the overwhelming  
and abundant goodness of God.

This experience of God's goodness transforms our humility of agitation,  
into a humility of gratitude, thanksgiving  
that God bestows God's love and goodness  
on us and the world.

This, Gregory says, is the journey of prayer:  
from humility in the face of the world's suffering  
to humility of thanksgiving for God's love and goodness.<sup>1</sup>

The disciples in today's story go fishing out of humble agitation:

with Jesus gone, they don't know what else to do  
other than what they've always done.

And the story ends with the disciples experiencing humility of gratitude:

Jesus has met them where they are and given them  
what they needed, and invited them to  
contribute what they can.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/reflection/spirituality-quarantine>

It is impossible right now to deny the suffering in the world,  
which seems to come into sharper focus each day  
with reports of war, gun violence, poverty.

We are all humbled by this and by all our  
Limitations in the face of suffering.

Regardless of who we are or where we are or what we can or can't do right now,  
we can take the humility we feel in the face of these challenges  
and channel it into our prayers,  
trusting that our loving God hears those prayers  
and will offer us glimpses of God's  
abundant goodness and grace,  
to which we respond in humble gratitude.

When I was in seminary, every Friday in chapel we celebrated communion  
by intinction, walking forward to take a piece of bread  
from a common loaf and dipping it into a cup of juice.  
One Friday, instead of letting me take a piece of bread  
just big enough to dip in the cup without  
getting my fingers in the juice but  
small enough to politely put in my mouth all at once,  
this professor holding the bread tore a huge chunk from the loaf

and gave it to me.

I wasn't going to refuse it, but I had no idea what to do with it.

I dipped it in the cup and bit off as big a bite as I could,  
but that still left a good-sized chunk in my hand.

I went back to my seat holding the rest of the bread and glanced around.

That's when I saw that all the people around me were wrestling  
with the same dilemma.

Some were trying to surreptitiously eat the rest of their bread,  
others were nervously holding it,  
and I even saw one person casually drop it on the floor  
as if by accident.

After everyone had received the elements, the professor spoke.

“The bread and juice you have just received is a sign of God's grace,  
which is always, always, more than we expect or deserve  
and more than we know what to do with,  
*more than enough.*”

Today's story of the disciples' final encounter with the resurrected Jesus

is the end of the gospel of John,

but this ending is really a kind of an epilogue,

an answer to the question

“In what way will Jesus show himself to us after he is gone?”

The answer is that Jesus shows himself to us now  
the way he did from the very beginning:  
with grace upon grace,  
with astonishing abundance,  
with the invitation to follow him.

Whatever we face today,  
may we know that God has given each one of us  
more than enough.  
God has invited us to follow our risen Lord,  
to do what we can  
to relieve suffering,  
to counter injustice,  
to reveal  
God's abundant and steadfast love to all the world.

Amen.

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