

GONE FISHIN'
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Third Sunday in Eastertide
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

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Once upon a time, the once-dead Jesus showed himself to his disciples in a house. That story is in John 20. In the next chapter, the lesson for today, Jesus showed himself at a lake.

It happened like this. Peter said, "I'm going fishing." And Thomas, Nathanael, James, John, and two others, said, "We're going with you."

So they went out on the Sea of Galilee. That night they caught nothing. Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the seashore; but they did not know it was him. (John 21:1-19)

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Last Sunday Ethel told you a resurrection story from the gospel of John. It went something like this: While his disciples were mourning his death in a room with doors and windows locked for fear of being arrested, Jesus suddenly appeared. He showed them his nail-scarred hands. There it was—a body last seen bleeding on the cross—standing in front of them.

Who knows what they actually saw. What they heard was this: *As the father sent me into the world, so send I you.*

And just like that they must have thought: *Oh, that can't be good. The world crucified you. Why can't we stay right here?*

And so he said it again: *As the father sent me, so I send you.*

Which is to say: We're not invited to build a shrine to Jesus or explain this inexplicable mystery. But we are invited to be lovers of the world. God so loved the world. (John 3:16) *So send I you.*

That's one resurrection story. Here's another.

Peter wasn't dealing very well with the brutal and shocking death of his dear friend Jesus. Despair had settled in. Many of us know that feeling. Endless nights.

I don't know about the rest of you, said Peter, but I'm going fishing. And six of his buddies jumped aboard.

That's one answer to grief. You hang up a sign: *Gone fishing'*. You leave your sorrows behind and go do something you love with friends.

No, it's not a cure. It's a distraction. It's not everything but it's something. You get up. You get out of yourself and you discover something you've not seen before. I don't know, maybe a boatload of fish. The world is full of surprises.

Over the past 40 years, I've been around a lot of death and a lot of grieving. And I've learned that in many cases there is no cure for a broken heart. Care, yes; cure, no. Many of us will go to our grave with a broken heart. But, then, I've also come to see that a broken heart itself may be the medicine that heals us in more ways than one.

A broken heart led Dr. Paul Farmer to give his life for the healing of Haiti. A broken heart led Mother Teresa to give her life for the dying of Calcutta. A broken heart led Dorothy Day to give her life for the homeless of New York City. A broken heart led Bryan Stevenson to give his life for those unjustly condemned to death in Alabama

prisons, mostly African Americans, including juveniles. You can read those heart-breaking stories in Stevenson's book, *Just Mercy*.

The world can break your heart.

Most of us, if not all of us, will go to our graves with a bucket full of grief, guilt and regrets. Not even Jesus could wave away Peter's grief, guilt and regrets.

Sometimes you just have to let a broken heart be. After all, it's the cracks that let in the light.

They fished all night and caught nothing. But at daybreak, light skimmed across the water and those broken, beaten souls caught sight of a shadowy shape on the shore.

Caught any fish, the shadowy shape shouted?

No. Nothing.

Try the other side.

They did. And suddenly their nets nearly burst with fish the way our broken lives sometimes burst with surprising, unforeseen grace in abundance.

Oh, my God! It's Jesus, they exclaimed.

Peter flung himself overboard and flew through the water while the others tugged their nets to shore.

Come, said Jesus, stirring glowing charcoals in a fire pit. Come, let's eat together.

And they did.

Then Jesus turned to Peter who was clutching a bucket load of guilt, grief and regrets in his heart. Jesus turned and called out his name. *Peter, do you love me?*

Jesus asked him three different times and each time Peter replied, *Lord, you know I love you.* And each time Jesus said, *Well, then, feed my sheep.*

And, then, Jesus added this: *Come and follow me.*

But how could Peter follow? And for that matter, how can we? There was no Jesus there to follow. There was only the way of Jesus, the way he left behind—the way of love.

Our work is to love the world. And sometimes that means hanging up a sign: *Gone fishin'.* Gone out to embrace the world for all it's worth. Gone out to find what can't be seen.

As it turns out, a lot of good work can be done with a broken heart tendered by grace. And so we take up our life—old boots, torn coat, scarred hands, wounded heart, crumpled fishing line and all. We take up our flawed and wounded life, give thanks and live it to the hilt today and every day until they put us in the grave.

What happens after that is not for us to know. We can't know. But we can trust. We trust that—no matter what—the Beloved will call our name and lead us home for in life and in death we belong to the One who is Love now and forever.