

## **“FOLLOW ME”**

Easter 3C April 18, 2010

Acts 1:1-20; Psalm 30;

Revelation 5:11-14; John 21:1-19

### **Introduction:**

For me, today's Gospel lesson is one of the most compelling stories in the Bible. The scene is on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, or the Sea of Tiberias, as it was known to the Romans. The Sea is a large lake with the Jordan River flowing in from the north and exiting at the southern end. It is not far from the village of Nazareth, where Jesus grew up. That part of Israel was familiar to Jesus. It is where His earthly ministry began, and where so many of his disciples were originally from. The land is fertile and grows good crops, and the Sea is teeming with fish. Thus, agriculture and fishing were the 'big two' industries.

After Jesus' death it was natural for the disciples to be discouraged and afraid for their own lives. They assumed, correctly I think, that they too could easily end up on Roman Crosses. At any rate, as John records the events of Jesus' post Resurrection appearances, he has seven of the eleven disciples returning to the Galilee. Out of ingrained habit, they go fishing. They don't know what else to do.

We do that when there is a crisis in our lives. We instinctively try to do something that is familiar and safe. Many women will begin cooking and cleaning. These seven disciples went fishing.

The waters of the Sea of Galilee are crystal clear, so most of the fishing takes place at night. The disciples have been fishing all night but have nothing to show for it except backs tired from hauling nets. As the Sun begins to rise

### **The Disciples Are Visited By Jesus.**

You've heard the expression, "You can run, but you can't hide". Not that they were trying to hide from Jesus, but He finds them and they are close enough to shore to call out to them: "Friends, do you have any fish?" "No", they answer. "Well, let out your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some".

The thing is, they didn't recognize Jesus right away, which was a common occurrence after His resurrection. There was something about Him that was just different enough that he was not immediately recognized by anyone. I guess the disciples, at least four of whom had been professional fishermen, must have thought the stranger knew something about fishing – or he could see a school of fish near their boat from his vantage

point – because they did exactly what he said. And when their net was fully deployed they captured a load of fish so great they could not pull in the net.

It turns out, they caught 153 fish. There is a particular type of fish in the Galilee that looks a lot like our fresh water bass. They call it the “St. Peter’s” fish. Imagine having 153 bass on the line at one time?

As the disciples began to get their equilibrium back from the shock of catching so many fish, John looked at the man on shore and recognized Jesus. He turned to Peter and said, “It is the Lord”. Peter immediately jumped out of the boat, leaving the others to maneuver the boat into shore dragging the net full of fish.

When they arrived Jesus was cooking them a breakfast of bread and fish. I guess Peter’s adrenalin was soaring at that point because he climbed aboard the boat and personally dragged the net full of fish ashore.

After breakfast, Jesus restored his relationship with Peter. He gave Peter an opportunity to reaffirm his love for Jesus for each time he denied knowing him; and each time Peter affirmed he loved Jesus, Jesus commissioned him to be the shepherd of His flock.

Then Jesus says something that might appear strangely placed. He discussed the kind of death Peter

would have, and then he commanded Peter

### **Follow Me!**

To where was Peter going to follow Jesus?

You know the technique movie directors will sometimes use, called flash backs? A scene will be interrupted by another scene from earlier in the action, or a person's life. It can be a very effective tool when done properly.

I think Jesus' simple command to Peter, "Follow Me!" might have caused a flash back in Peter's mind. Luke recorded a scene in his gospel, in the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter, verses 22-27, that Peter might have flashed to. Listen to Jesus' words from Luke: *"The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."* <sup>23</sup>Then he said to them all, *"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."* There it is, "follow me". But it is this next part that might have really spoken to Peter after his betrayal and Jesus' restoration of their relationship: <sup>24</sup>*For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.* <sup>25</sup>*What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves?* <sup>26</sup>*Those who are ashamed of me and of my words, of them the Son of Man will be*

*ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. <sup>27</sup>But truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.”*

Peter who had once followed Jesus without question, then betrayed him, and is now being restored, has to again commit himself to following Jesus. The Book of Acts, and Roman history, informs us that Peter never again looked back in his pursuit of following Jesus. He followed Him all the way to a Roman Cross. In the interim, Peter saw things and went places that would have simply been beyond the scope of a Galilean fisherman to even conceive. From that point on, Peter faithfully followed Jesus – his Lord.

### **What Does Following Jesus Mean For Us?**

There is no one single answer to that question. If you are a Christian born in the southern part of Sudan known as the Dafur region, following Jesus today means persecution, starvation, and quite possibly execution at the hands of the Muslims who run the country.

On April 9<sup>th</sup>, Baroness Caroline Cox, from Great Britain, speaking at Ridgecrest, North Carolina, to a group of Priests, lay persons and Bishops, about the incursion of fundamentalist Islam on British life also spoke of what is

happening in Sudan. Two million Sudanese have been killed by the Muslim government seeking to control the oil wealth that lies within Dafur. Cox showed a series of slides with one photo of a blind Sudanese woman holding a child dying of malnutrition, saying, **"I would sooner live and die a Christian than accept food to change my religion."** How is that for 'following Jesus'?

The world is increasingly becoming more hostile towards Christianity with the result of Christians becoming more marginalized. Again, Baroness Cox giving an example from what is happening right now in England: *Militant Islamic apologists are using the freedoms of democracy to destroy the very freedoms the West enshrines. Pending legislation in Britain is destroying our fundamental freedom of speech. If one is critical of Islam one can be declared a criminal and get 7 years in prison.*

It isn't that bad here, yet; but what does it mean to you to "follow Jesus"? What price do you now pay? What price would you be willing to pay? How important is following Jesus to you?

<sup>12</sup>*Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."* John 8:12

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