

Holy Mackerel (June 2/19)

John 21:1-14 by Patty Friesen

Fish Eyes Skit Scene 14

In our Fish Eyes skit from John's gospel, the poor disciples who gave up fishing to follow Jesus who gave them a new purpose and calling, are left without him after the crucifixion. They are disoriented in their grief and don't know what to do so they go back to fishing, which according to the gospels, they may not have been very good at anyhow - always coming up with empty nets.

The disciples do not even recognize Jesus when they see him on shore. This is the third time that Jesus has appeared to them but they still do not recognize him. Jesus asks them, "Do you have any fish?" Their answer is no. They do not have fish - neither the fish they need to trade and sell for their survival nor fish even for their meal for the day. Once again, Jesus tells them how to fish – "put your nets on the right side." They do so and come up with nets full to breaking. It is a miracle.

Now when it comes to how God works in the Bible - we see that God works in three distinct ways. #1 In unexplainable miraculous ways. #2 In collaboration with human beings. #3 In profound presence and sustaining power in difficult times.

#1 - The miraculous ways God works. St. Augustine wrote many centuries ago that what we humans call miracle has more to do with timing than anything else. He defines a miracle as God choosing to do quickly what God usually does at a more deliberate pace through the course of history. Augustine says when Jesus multiplied the fish, he was doing what God the Creator usually does in a much slower time frame. Fish are always being multiplied in lakes, rivers and oceans. God created fish to

multiply: every time they swim upstream and spawn millions of eggs, they are being multiplied in the slow, slow pace of nature's time. In this respect, everything in creation is miraculous. That anything exists, that anything has been called out of nothingness into being - that's the towering miracle in the first place. Whether God creates quickly or creates slowly is not as astonishing as the fact that anything is created at all. Therefore, we would do well not to close our minds too quickly to the possibility of the surprising, to the transcendent One doing things in a different way than the usual slow way of creation. We have no clue what is possible in the realm of mystery and so where there were no fish on one side of the boat - there are suddenly 153 on the other side.

So in the Bible and in our own history, miracles happen: something we cannot account for occurs and for causes we can never identify and our circumstances get changed. It seems that occasionally God breaks in from beyond. But to think this is the *only* way that God works in the world, limits God and limits our faith. There are two more ways God works that are just as powerful and valid as miraculous in breaking from beyond.

#2 - The second way God works is in collaboration with us. There are times when God comes to where we are and offers to do something with us; when the divine energies inspire us to be creative and ingenious, invite us to do something toward the solution of our problems, the collaborative form of God's coming is just as valid as the miraculous. Jesus tells the disciples to cast their nets on the right side of the boat - they have to collaborate and work with Jesus, slow as they are, to make the miracle happen.

And when they collaborate, even with a stranger they don't recognize, they don't just increase their haul; they also recognize Jesus in the miracle. Only when they

are open to something and someone new, do they realize that Jesus is in their midst. John recognizes Jesus in the abundant fish and says, It is the Lord! Jesus tells them to bring the fish that they have just caught and Peter hauls the net ashore and there were 153 fish, symbolizing the many diverse kinds of fish and diverse kinds of people that are caught in the net of God. But this kind of fishing for fish and people takes collaboration between God and us.

The third way God works in the world through powerful presence and ongoing sustenance in difficult times. God offers us help simply in the power to endure what cannot be changed and to allow the change to take place within us for strength and peace and new perspective on the difficulty, rather than change in the outward circumstances that we face. If we are open ourselves, we will realize that there are times that we can expect the in-breaking of divine power beyond ourselves to miraculously change circumstances; and at other times the divine power comes inspiring us to join with God in finding a joint solution and there are times when the only form grace takes is the power to simply hang in there and not give up and to move inch by inch. And this grace of presence with us may be the most powerful of all.

We have witnessed the grace of this presence and sustenance through this year as we reach anniversaries of diagnoses and deaths of loved ones. We have got through this year step by step, inch by inch and I've been so thankful for the resilience and power people have had to simply hang in there day by day. This resiliency in health is also reflected in our prayers for resiliency in times of drought – talk about things we cannot control and while we may pray for the miracle of rain – I think it will be equally miraculous if we are sustained with calm in the midst of this agricultural disaster

and loss of income for farmers. Those of us who are old enough have seen dry years before but I haven't and I panic and need reminding of the cycle of drought on the prairies. Let's recognize Jesus' risen presence and power with us in all the circumstances in our lives. Let us pray...

God of resurrection abundance, you have given us everything we need. Fill our nets and our trust and our calm and amazement. We aren't worthy of such overflowing love but we receive it as a gift of grace to begin to live a life of grace. Amen.

New Interpreter's Bible Commentary Luke/John
This Incomplete One, ed. Michael D. Bush