

Introductory

This material is exclusive to John. It is not appointed to be read on Sunday in the TLH one-year lectionary. It is appointed to be read on the Third Sunday of Easter, Series C in LW and in LSB. In years A and B, the readings for this Sunday are from Luke, the Road to Emmaus on Easter Sunday. This pericope takes place after that and after last Sunday's reading.

Textual Notes

1. All the Gospels record the Resurrection, Luke records the Road to Emmaus later that same day, and John records the appearance of Jesus in That Room on Easter Sunday evening and the following Sunday. Now, “Μετὰ ταῦτα ἐφάνέρωσεν ἑαυτὸν πάλιν Ἰησοῦς τοῖς μαθηταῖς – after these things, Jesus again revealed Himself to the disciples.”

The timing seems to be uncertain; it was after the eighth day of the Resurrection and before the Ascension at forty days. On the eighth day they are still fearful and locked in That Room but think about that room. How long can you be in a closed-up room with no sunlight and primitive facilities and all that goes with that before you decide that anything is better than this.

That's one thing. Another thing is that they have seen Jesus alive – twice. After the first time, we find them a week later in the same state, but after the second time, at some point, they left. Was there something about the second appearing of Jesus to them that made them get out of That Room, or was it that Thomas was there and saw Jesus and then he led them out?

That's the thing that's different between the first appearing of Jesus in That Room and the second. I have taken to calling him Brave, Courageous Thomas to try to be the antidote to generations of people who haven't done anything calling him “doubting Thomas” – you do know about the Mar Thomas churches in India and Syria, and that he was martyred, don't you?

When they come to tell Jesus that Lazarus is ill (John 11), Jesus delays – He's going somewhere with this – and when He is ready to set off to go there, the disciples warn that “the Jews were but now seeking to stone you,” Jesus says things, then (11:15) says “let's go,” and they appear to hesitate because Thomas has to say “Let us also go; that we may die with Him” and they go.

He finds them “ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης τῆς Τιβεριάδος· ἐφάνέρωσεν δὲ οὕτως – upon the Sea of Tiberias, and He revealed Himself to them like this” and then He tells us how He did that. The Sea of Tiberias – sometimes called Lake Tiberias – is better known to us as the Sea of Galilee. It has several other names, but for many of these men, it was the place they called home.

2. Noteworthy if you consider my Thomas as Leader thesis credible, he is here listed after Peter, “ἦσαν ὁμοῦ Σίμων Πέτρος καὶ Θωμᾶς ὁ λεγόμενος Δίδυμος καὶ Ναθαναὴλ ὁ ἀπὸ Κανᾶ τῆς Γαλιλαίας – they were together Simon Peter and Thomas (called the Twin) and Nathanael from Cana in Galilee” Peter and Nathanael are fishermen, and Thomas may well have been.

Either that, or Thomas was the only non-fisherman in the lot, “καὶ οἱ τοῦ Ζεβεδαίου καὶ ἄλλοι ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ δύο – the sons of Zebedee and also two other disciples.” Zebedee’s boys are James and John, fishermen, and the two others are not named. Had they been of the Twelve, they most certainly would have been, but they are not, so probably were not.

Is the point here that there were other followers (disciples) of Jesus besides the Twelve? And where are Matthew the Tax Collector and the others? It looks like the fishermen went back to fishing, and probably the rest went back to whatever they had left. If that be the case, then the gang was all there for the Ascension, according to all three synoptics. But apparently not yet.

Galilee was sort of a safe space for Jesus and the rest. It was home to Him and to many of them, and it was away from Jerusalem, the stronghold of His enemies. After the death of John B, all three synoptics make a point of Jesus returning to Galilee. As for Jesus after the Resurrection, three times Matthew records Jesus saying that post-resurrection, He will go to Galilee.

At Passover (26:32), He declares, “after I have been raised, I will go before you into Galilee.” On Sunday morning, the angel (28:7) tells Mary M to tell the disciples “He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see Him.” Then (28: 9-10), Jesus Himself tells them “Rejoice...Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me.”

3. So nothing profound here, “λέγει αὐτοῖς Σίμων Πέτρος Ὑπάγω ἀλιεῦν – Simon Peter says to them, ‘I am going to fish,’” and they asked if they could come with, and Captain Peter says okay and they all pile into the boat. They fished all night, letting their nets down here, now there, and by morning “ἐπιάσαν οὐδέν – they caught nothing,” which is very hard to do.

4. When morning came, “ἔστη Ἰησοῦς εἰς τὸν αἰγιαλόν· οὐ μέντοι ᾔδεισαν οἱ μαθηταὶ ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστίν – Jesus stood on the shore; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.” Neither did Mary M recognize Him (20:14), and He was just standing there, not preaching, not doing miracles, which was not the normal look for Jesus.

Neither had the men on the road to Emmaus recognized Jesus until “the breaking of the bread,” and when He appeared to these men later that day, they had declared “we have seen the Lord.” Here, things like distance, perhaps a mist – it doesn’t say that – and we don’t know what kind of eyesight these people had, but we do know that neither glasses nor contacts have been invented.

5. He’s close enough for them to hear Him, and there are Greek words for “yell,” and this isn’t one of them, but Jesus knows how to project His voice, and He rhetorically asks, “Παῖδιά, μή τι

προσφάγιον ἔχετε; ἀπεκρίθησαν αὐτῷ Οὐ - ‘Children, don’t you have any fish?’ and they answered Him ‘No.’” He calls them “children,” which would have been a red flag.

It would have been a red flag because what adult calls a group of adults that? And how does the guy standing on the shore seem to know that we haven’t caught any fish, which would have been unusual. And things like that must have alerted something in them that something unusual is going on here, because what they are about to do would have been most unusual of all.

6. The man standing on the shore tells them to cast their nets onto the other side of the boat, and they did! And when they did, “καὶ οὐκέτι αὐτὸ ἐλκύσαι ἴσχυον ἀπὸ τοῦ πλήθους τῶν ἰχθύων – and they were unable to haul it in because of the large number of fish,” and that was the most unusual of all, and that looks a lot like something Jesus would do (Luke 5: 1-11)!

7. John, the writer, and “ὁ μαθητὴς ἐκεῖνος ὃν ἠγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς – the disciple whom Jesus loved,” tells us that it was he who spotted Jesus, crying out, “τῷ Πέτρῳ Ὁ Κύριός ἐστιν – to Peter, ‘It is the Lord (Jesus).’” Peter puts some clothes on, and not wanting to wait for the boat with its now heavy load to reach shore, jumps in, presumably to make it to shore more quickly.

8. While Peter is doing that, the rest of them came to the shore in the boat, loaded with the fish, “ἀλλὰ ὡς ἀπὸ πηχῶν διακοσίων, σύροντες τὸ δίκτυον τῶν ἰχθύων – but they were two hundred cubits away, dragging the net with the fish.” Three hundred feet is a football field, pretty close to shore, (emphatically) but the net was full of fish, a continuing point of interest for the writer.

9. When they made land “βλέπουσιν ἀνθρακιὰν κειμένην καὶ ὀψάριον ἐπικείμενον καὶ ἄρτον – they saw a heap of burning coals, and fish lying on it, and bread (food).” I always wondered why John mentioned the “burning coals,” and I think Jesus is getting into Peter’s head, and John is rubbing it in. The only other occurrence of that word is earlier in John (18:18.)

Maybe you wondered why John mentioned there that there was a fire of “burning coals” in the courtyard at the residence of Caiaphas on the night of the trial of Jesus. Peter had been standing there warming himself while he was busying himself with denying Jesus – three times. Given the conversation Jesus is about to have with Peter...this is a good starting point.

10. There is nothing unusual about Jesus imperatively telling Peter to bring “τῶν ὀψαρίων ὧν ἐπιάσατε νῦν – some of the fish you have caught now. “ Fresh fish is always a good thing, and one of the perks of being a fisherman has to be that you can eat fresh fish whenever you want. Besides, there are a lot of people here, and they are probably hungry.

11. Maybe it was only fair that Peter, who had slacked by leaving his mates on the sea with a load of fish, should now be sent back to the boat by Jesus, where he “εἴλκυσεν τὸ δίκτυον εἰς τὴν γῆν – drew the net into the land.” The verb indicates that a certain amount of effort was required to bring that net to shore. It was hard work regardless, and harder still here.

Harder because the net was “μεστὸν ἰχθύων μεγάλων ἑκατὸν πενήκοντα τριῶν – full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three.” So large was the load that it was tearing the net. As to the number, there are a lot more theories on the Internet as to its meaning than there were then, and the WIK article on “153 (number)” is a good starting point, and that’s that.

If *Deadliest Catch* has taught us anything, it has taught us that fishermen always count their catch; so, we know that they caught 153 fish. Probably there is some symbolic significance to that number, especially in John, but that doesn’t mean that we know what it is. It was a long time ago and in a faraway place, and what might have been clear to the 1st century reader...

12. Jesus uses two imperatives to tell them “Δεῦτε ἀριστήσατε – come, eat” an example of the Imperative as invitation. Gathered together, dining with Jesus “οὐδεὶς ἐτόλμα τῶν μαθητῶν ἐξετάσαι αὐτόν Σὺ τίς εἶ – no one of the disciples had the guts to ask Him. ‘who are you?’” The verb “to ask” has connotations of questioning or interrogating or examining Him.

It would have been a confirmation of what they had already figured out, because “εἰδότες ὅτι ὁ Κύριός ἐστιν – knowing it is the Lord,” but more than that there must have been about a million questions on their minds; what’s it like to die, what’s it like to be made alive again, what did hell look like when you went there, what’s going to happen now, how long are you staying?

13. While they are feeling awkward, Jesus serves up the meal, “ἔρχεται Ἰησοῦς καὶ λαμβάνει τὸν ἄρτον καὶ δίδωσιν αὐτοῖς, καὶ τὸ ὀψάριον ὁμοίως – Jesus comes and takes the bread and gives to them and the fish likewise.”

Easter 3C – 2010

Introductory

We are in the midst of the forty days between the resurrection of Jesus and His ascension. The number forty is significant. It is the number of years that Israel wandered in the wilderness, and it is the number of days that Jesus was in the wilderness being tempted by Satan. These forty days are Jesus' last on this sinful planet before He is taken up to holy heaven forever. The number forty is also symbolic; 4 X 10. Four is the number of creation and ten is the number of completeness. Jesus has completed his work of redeeming all creation.

During those forty days Jesus appeared to many people. There could therefore be no question that He was alive after the crucifixion. From the very beginning, when the guards reported to the religious leaders that Jesus was gone, only to be told to say that the disciples had taken Him while the guards were asleep, people have denied the resurrection. Even the twelve were skeptical. In 1 Cor 15 Paul names the names of individuals who had seen Jesus alive after the crucifixion and asserts that over 500 people witnessed the living Jesus.

This text for Easter 3 is a continuation of the text for Easter 2. The setting is now the Sea of Galilee. Matthew relates (28:10) that Jesus had told the disciples to "go to Galilee," and they had. But they had not gone there right away. They are in the room with locked doors and windows at least a week after the Resurrection. Was there something about that appearance that caused them to actually do what He had told them to do, go to Galilee?

Maybe seeing Jesus alive made them take Him more seriously. Wouldn't you? Or was it simply a matter of how long can you remain in seclusion before you get on with your life. Or was it that, fearing for their lives, they were a lot safer in Galilee than in Jerusalem. As with most things, their going back to Galilee was probably motivated by many factors.

Jesus now appears to them, John notes, for the third time. We saw the first two last week, the two appearances in the room with the shut and locked doors and windows. (You might want to mention the appearing of Jesus on the road to Emmaus to people who are not these people, just to fill in the chronology.)

Others have noted that John seems to have ended his gospel account with chapter 20 with that nice conclusion about why he wrote it. That ending is very similar to the ending of chapter 21. Most likely John was going to end the book at chapter 20 but was compelled by something, perhaps questions about the 40 days, to write chapter 21. Perhaps there is another reason why he seems to have concluded twice. Perhaps it's not really that important...

Finally, to note the obvious, these men are fishermen. They fish for a living.

Law/Gospel

Hunger/Filled - Eden was a place of abundance where Adam and Eve never wanted for food or anything else. Not so much after the fall. The lack of adequate food and hunger are by-products of the fall into sin. This is a concept that Americans and other Westerners have a hard time getting their heads around. Our problem is too much food, not a paucity of it, so you may have to help them understand that historically hunger, not obesity, has been the problem. Jesus has a track record of feeding hungry people, and in abundance. As He makes clear in the Sermon on the Mount and in other places, the Father gives enough food to eat, another concept difficult to communicate to Americans. We think that we get food because we work and go to the grocery store and buy it. That's not the way it works. God give us food, and in heaven there will be no shortage of food. I would use figures of speech involving food to help get these points across.

Want/Abundance - In this world we want for many things. Heaven promises not only that our wants and needs will be filled, but that there will be an abundance, as Paul puts it in Ephesians, "more than we can ask or imagine..." The fishermen had no fish, then they had a lot of fish. That's how God works. Americans have a foretaste of this abundance all around them, not to mention the Sacrament, a "foretaste of the feast to come."

Hidden/Manifest- Once again we see the hidden Divine manifesting Himself in the person of Jesus. What a terrible thing it is to be ignorant about God, to know that there is a Divine, but not knowing what it is like. It's that ignorance that leads people to worship stuff from trees to birds to other people. What a wonderful thing it is to have the Divine manifest in the person of Jesus, no more clear than in the events of Holy Week. That same Jesus is made manifest in our midst in the Sacrament and Word.

Death/Resurrection - Jesus had been dead, and now He is alive. One day you will die, but you will come back to life.

Textual Notes

John says that Jesus "revealed" Himself to these men. It's the common word for an epiphany, the same word John uses in chapter 2, the wedding at Cana, the first "epiphany."

Jesus had told His disciples that He would be going away from them to a place where they could not go; to the cross, the grave, and hell. After the resurrection, He told them to go to Galilee, which they eventually did. Galilee was home, so that worked out.

In an of itself, there is nothing profound in Peter's decision to go fishing. The verb for "fish" is present active infinitive, indicating that Peter was not just going to go out and see if anything is biting today. Rather, he is going to return to his fishing business, and the rest are quick to join him. By this time they understood much about the resurrected Jesus, but they were not going to let any grass grow under their feet waiting for Him.

Jesus stands on the beach and they did not know that it was him. The word translated “they (didn’t) know” is the one that is often translated “behold” and it’s in the pluperfect tense. In spite of having seen Him, they had yet to comprehend the whole idea of the risen Christ.

Liberal commentators take this to mean that this part was clearly appended by a different writer at a later time, since these men had already seen Jesus twice in the locked room. Bible scholars who are not lazy understand that even though they had indeed seen Jesus, they had a hard time getting their heads around what was happening. That is completely understandable. The death of a loved one is traumatic, and the circumstances of the death of Jesus were devastating to his followers. The idea of a resurrected Jesus is old hat to us, but we’ve had 2,000 years to get used to it. To them it was a new idea and clearly it would take awhile to get used to it. (By “take awhile” I mean that they finally “got it” at Pentecost, God’s doing.)

Jesus was about 100 yards away from them, which some think may have kept them from recognizing Him, but this does not appear to have been a factor. We note that they finally recognize Jesus in the miracle of the large catch of fish. Does that mean that they understand everything about everything? No, that doesn’t come until Pentecost. Wait for it...

Jesus calls them “children,” the standard, generic term.

John calls himself “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” which he does on several occasions. Here the word is “agape,” self-sacrificial love, as it is in chapter 13 23. But at the cross he uses the word “filos,” brotherly love, to describe his relationship with Jesus. Go figure. The context of the cross has Jesus talking to John about Mary and to Mary about John. Perhaps that explains the use of “filos” and not “agape” there.

John confesses “it is the Lord,” and Peter responds like Peter responds. He literally “throws himself into the sea” and runs to shore naked. (I often refer to Peter as “the Apostle too impetuous to play it safe,” but if you didn’t watch the TV show The Big Valley back in the day, then you don’t get it. Usually I’ll get a few people who did, and who remember, and who smile.” The explanations that take the miracle out of this catch are just plain silly, and why would John make that confession of fish if Jesus, from shore, saw a school of fish and directed them to it, as one commentator suggested? Besides that, it’s not the first time that Jesus has done this sort of thing with these men.

Fish and bread. Now where have we seen that Value Meal before...

What about the 153 fish? First of all, there were 153 fish in the net when the fishermen pulled it up. Secondly, there has to be more to it than that, especially since this is John. There’s always more to it with John. The ancients gave several explanations, the most common of which is probably Jerome’s assertion that there were 153 different kinds of fish in the world. We now know that there are more kinds of fish than that. The other way to deal with that number is to simply ignore it, but if we do then it will be the one question still on the listener’s mind when he leaves the building. She may even ask you about it afterwards.

The Internet is, according to my favorite sports talk show guy, “the best thing and the worst thing ever.” If you’re looking for the meaning of the number 153, the Internet is very useful. The google search “one hundred fifty three fish” returns lots of hits. I looked at the first two, and both were helpful.

The basic thesis of http://www.theopenscroll.com/beyond_veil/appendices/seventeen.htm is that $17 \times 3 \times 3 = 153$. 17 is the number of resurrection, since Jesus was crucified on Nissan 14.

<http://www.biblestudy.org/bibleref/meaning-of-numbers-in-bible/153.html> thinks that the numbers of the “Sons of God” are equal to 153.

Those two give us probably already too much information. Caution! You do know that anybody can put anything on the Internet, right?

The entire “breakfast” scene has Jesus in close contact with the disciples, performing a series of very human, almost mundane tasks. Jerome points out that these things are all intended to assure the disciples that this was not a ghost or an apparition, a common explanation to the appearances of Jesus, but really Jesus Himself.

That the disciples were timid to make thorough inquiries into what was going on here (“none dared ask Him...”) should not surprise us. I don’t like the translation “dare.” I like the word “timid,” which is why I used it. And it does not say that they were completely silent. It says that they were too timid to “make thorough enquiry.” Again, in light of the circumstances, what do we expect them to do? Like the youngsters say, “AWKWARD!”

John ends this section with the words “after He was raised from the dead,” the exclamation point on the entire incident.