

The Rev. Renee L. Fenner
St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church
3rd Sunday of Easter/Year C
May 5, 2019
Text: John 21:1-19

Alleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

I am willing to bet that most of us love a good beginning to a story; be it a movie, a live performance or a book. We like for that thing to grab our attention at the offset and then keep it. I know for myself that for a movie or stage performance to be good or even great, it's got to grab me within the first few minutes or I am apt to nod off. The same goes for a book. It has to get my attention in the first few pages or I am done. But even better is a good ending. There is nothing worse having that movie or performance or book end poorly-an ending that leaves you saying, 'huh?' Which is one reason I stopped watching the Lifetime Movie Channel. There was a brief period in time that I spent entire Saturdays glued to that station until I grew tired of the endings that seemed to putter or fizzle away and made absolutely no sense at all-leaving me to think: Are you kidding me? Was that really the end?

Now, don't go running to the bishop about what I am about to say next but really, was John confused about how his Gospel was supposed to end? Don't get me wrong but it does seem as if John's gospel has two endings. Have you noticed? The first ending tells the story of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to his disciples. How he appeared in the midst of them in spite of closed doors and breathed into them the Holy Spirit and how Thomas came to believe. Last week's gospel even ended with these words in verse 30: *"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name."*

Sounded like the end to me but then it seems that John was not really ready to end the Jesus story and so we get this wonderful additional ending situated along the Sea of Tiberias. It is as if, as the great preacher and theologian, Barbara Brown Taylor, once wrote, that "everyone knows hard it is to come to an end. You think you have said everything, and then you think of something else, something too important to leave out. "P.S.," you

write at the bottom of the page, and maybe a “P.P.S.” after that, because it is hard to stop, hard to fold the letter and lick the stamp (or hit the “send” button) and call it done.”*

On this Third Sunday of Easter, there are no closed doors this time, no hiding from religious leaders, but rather a quest to going back to a familiar state of life.

“I am going fishing,” Peter announced. This was something Peter knew something about; after all it had been his life’s work before Jesus called him to follow him three years earlier. The familiar must have sounded good to him and to six others after what happened over the last few days.

As we heard in our reading, the disciples had spent an entire night on the water throwing out their nets and pulling in nothing but seaweed. But as the sun began to rise, they saw a figure walking along the shore and it called out to them. It was someone they did not recognize but they heard the voice suggest that they drop their nets on the other side of their boat. They do and their nets swell with an incredible catch so much so that they can barely pull them in. But wait! They had lived this moment before: the boats, the nets, and a stranger calling out to them to try the other side. One of them, the beloved disciple, cried out, “It is the Lord!” realizing that the figure standing on the beach is no stranger. And good old Peter quickly dives into the water leaving his friends behind to handle the nets and fish. As they come closer they see for themselves a charcoal fire with fish cooking on it and freshly baked bread.

“Come,” Jesus said to his friends, “Come and have breakfast.” And the small group feasted as they did numerous times during those three years they were together.

We can’t help but wonder what Peter thought as Jesus handed him a bit of fish and bread. After all, Jesus told Peter during their last meal together that Peter would deny knowing him. And Peter was adamant that he would never do such a thing but it happened just as Jesus said it would. Peter would sit in the darkness near a fire and deny Jesus-not once but three times. But now as they sat along the shore Jesus feeds Peter as the sun is rising by a new fire.

He asks Peter if he loves him. Not once. Not twice. But three times. One for each denial. And for each denial there is no blame or shame. No, “Why did you run away” or “I told you so.” Instead there is restoration. There is healing. There is mercy. There is love. And the invitation to follow Jesus again. Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep.

More than 2,000 years have gone by and Jesus continues to invite those who love and follow him into new life. Yes, sometimes we are like Peter-weighed down by guilt, by our feelings of inadequacy, and by the temptation to simply ‘go back to fishing’- back to who we were before, content with business as usual. The fear of the unknown sometimes keeping us from reaching out and venturing out and trying new things. But like Peter and the disciples and the early followers of Jesus, you and I are not the same as we were before. We are an Easter people, people restored and transformed by the light and love of the risen Lord who comforts, and heals, and breathes into each of us new life, renewed spirits, and sends us out into the world to feed and to tend to God’s sheep. To make new disciples.

Jesus left the beginning of the Church in good hands as do I. So perhaps it is fitting that during this Easter season, a season filled with “Alleluias” and re-birth that this chapter in our life together closes. And it is so hard to close this chapter.

I have loved these years being your priest. I have loved being part of your lives in the good times and in the bad and in all of the ways of being the Body of Christ together. It is hard to believe that nine years have gone by so quickly!

I cannot begin to express my thankfulness. You have to know that while I am so excited to be called as priest-in-charge of All Saints and Ascension, I am very sad to leave you. There are too many blessings I can name and too many people to thank.

You have taught me, challenged me, worked with me, fed me, clothed me, and taken care of me after surgeries. You have prayed with me and for me and loved me. You have shown loving hospitality to my family and friends. You allowed me to take care of myself in the best way I know how-many of you traveling with me as Addaperle and the munchkins told Dorothy how to get to the Wiz who lived in the great city of Oz. In short,

you have helped me be a better person and a better priest because of your leadership, commitment, encouragement, and support.

Continue to strive to be who you are meant to be as individuals and as the parish family of St. Barnabas. Continue to dream and to vision with your Vestry. Continue to share your gifts and your talents and your time with each other and those who are homebound (please don't forget them). Continue to be a loving place overflowing with hospitality, love, and the grace of God. Continue to be the shining light on the hill here in the heart of Florissant. Continue to show others how good outreach ministries can be done and how different expressions of faith can come together to worship God. Continue to show others the face of Jesus.

Only God knows what the future will hold but do not be discouraged or afraid because you got this and God has got you!

While I will no longer be your priest, please know that I will always continue to hold you in my prayers. You are a part of the "fabric" that makes me who I am and will be. And nothing and nobody can take that away.

I ask that you please pray for me and for the parish family of All Saints and Ascension. Pray that together and with God's help, we- ASA, you the family of St. Barnabas, and the family St. Stephen's will continue to make up the Episcopal presence in the North St. Louis County region of this Diocese.

There are still more chapters to be written and more stories to be told.

Thank you! And know that I will always love you.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

Amen!

*taken from "The First Breakfast", a sermon by Barbara Brown Taylor, in Gospel Medicine