

Trinity Church (ELCA)

Stephens City, Virginia

Sunday's Sermon

April 10, 2016

The Rev. Mr. Cameron P. Keyser

Easter 3-C

For 10 years, we lived in Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina – just over the Cooper River Bridge from Charleston...on a spit of land that bordered both the expansive Charleston Harbor, and the quaint, narrow, almost non-navigable “Shem Creek.” Any of you know where I’m talking about?

The 4 or 500 yards of the creek that were navigable have about a half-dozen – or less – sorta’ “hard-to-get-to-unless-you- really-want-to” restaurants. “The wreck” is the local’s favorite and the “hardest-to-get-to-unless-you- really-want-to” of all.

The menu is simple: 3 or 4 fish plates – depending on what day and what time you show up...no substitutions. No special requests. No fancy tablecloths or silverware, either. Eat what we have on the paper plates with the plastic utensils, or not. That’s the way “The Wreck” works.

Right in front, they have their own pier. And at about 4 every afternoon, their own boat – aptly named ‘Last Legs’ – sputters-in and ties-up. Out on the dock they throw their daily catch: sometimes shrimp, sometimes flounder...sometimes tuna: sometimes more of one than another; but, at others – hardly any of anything. That’s why the menu changes at “The Wreck” daily: it all depends on what the men bring in that day. On any given day, you might get there only to discover the restaurant was closed because the day’s ‘bounty’ just wasn’t enough.

Now, I didn’t know *many*, but I was acquainted with a few of the fishermen – who, in-between slicing and dicing and tossing fish guts over the edge - cussed. Didn’t matter if they had a reason to our not – they cussed every *thing* – and darn near every *one!*: the weather, the tides, the holes they had to mend in their nets, the ancient engine down inside the dilapidated wooden-hull...

They were a rough lot. Probably didn’t go to Sunday School – most likely, got kicked out at an early age. Spent a lot of time in bars...and the stories they could tell were chocked full of fanciful imagery and vivid memory – almost like a fairy tale: of a world “out there” on the mysterious sea that we had never known.

Once in a while a story was clean enough, that one of the fishermen would share it with the crowd gathered ‘round to watch them clean – like the one about the kid who was fishing right off the pier one day: a string of freshly-caught sea bass dangling in a bucket at his feet – when a state conservation officer came up. “Got a license to catch those fish?,” he inquired.

“Nope,” the young man replied. “Don’t need one. They’re my pet fish. I was just givin’ them a little exercise...”

“Pet fish?” the officer asked. “What do you mean, ‘pet’ fish?”

The young man explained: “Well, every night, I bring ‘em down here and let ‘em swim for awhile...then, when I whistle, they jump right back into my ice chests, and I take ‘em home.”

“That’s a bunch of hooley!” said the officer: “Fish can’t do that.”

“Oh yes they can,” the young man said. “Here, I’ll show you:” He bent down, picked up the stringer, flipped the latch - and *whoosssh!*: away they went: back – into the deep water of Shem Creek.

The officer just stood and waited.... After several minutes, he looks at the boy and says, “Well?”

“Well, what?”

“Well, when are you goina’ whistle and call ‘em back?,” the officer asked.

“Call *who* back?” the young man said with a sneaky grin.

“The *fish!*,” replied the officer.

The young man asked... “*What* fish?”

The old ‘disappearing act’ – just like Jesus had done at the tomb 2 weeks ago this morning. And, where does he show himself again?: on a beach fixing breakfast for the disciples.

So typical of Jesus: apt to show up in the very midst of life at its most real and inescapable - not in a blaze of blinding light, not even in the midst of an enthralling sermon, but...at dawn, or while you’re walking along a road...or, like today: in the midst of a bad day at work – a poor catch on the sea. It’s never from “on high” - but always in the midst: in the midst of people

and real life, and in the midst of the questions real life asks....

You might assume that this little “Breakfast At Tiberius” scene – as I like to call it, is just another example of Jesus’ servanthood: his caring for others. and, you could take it as just that. *But...*one of the commentators I read this week encourages us to focus on – of all things – the *fire*.

“This is no ordinary fire,” he writes. “It’s a charcoal fire.” And that’s significant because the last time there was a charcoal fire, it was outside the palace of the high priest during Jesus’ trial, and just before the cock crowed...

“Peter must’ve stopped dead in his tracks coming out of the water this morning: seeing Jesus standing beside a charcoal fire. Three times Peter *denied* Jesus around a charcoal fire. And, this morning, three times Jesus *forgives* Peter around a charcoal fire.

“Do you love me?,” he asks. “Feed my lambs, Peter.

“Do you love me? “Tend my sheep.”

“Do you love me, Peter? Feed my sheep.”

Peter had gotten his old job back. It was ‘The Rock’s’ final promotion, and from that day on, he never let the front office down again.”

Back in the '92 Olympics in Barcelona – the 400-meter race - Derrick Redman, a sprinter from Great Britain, rounded the last curve - and fell. He eventually got up, gripping his thigh – his face contorted in pain. He’d torn his hamstring. Even though he could barely move, Redman started hobbling along toward the finish line – despite efforts of the Olympic officials to move him off to the shoulder.

Just then, a man came out of the stands: it was Derrick’s dad – and he put out his hand. Redman took it – and, leaning on his father's arm, finished the race.

There’s a time in life when we all fall flat on our face...a time when we’re *all* Derrick Redman: we need

somebody else: someone's forgiveness, somebody's patience, someone's grace and compassion - just like Peter did this morning - and all the disciples.

Just days before the crucifixion - as they were walking toward Jerusalem: remember what they were doing? Boasting, bragging about which was the ‘greatest.’ Now, just a few days later, look at ‘em: *none* had delivered on their boasting. Every one of them had bumbled, and screwed-up – just like we do.

We boast of our self-reliance. We brag about ‘our’ marvelous achievements: devour books on self-help; flock to really expensive seminars to find motivation to “do it yourself” – and, get all caught up in the Great American Myth of self reliance - even, start believing that it really *is* all about you.

But, there are times when – like Derrick Redman and Peter – we all need to grab someone’s hand to help us along. Today’s text tells us that's what happens when you grow *old*. But, *i* think it’s what happens when you grow *up* – when you mature, discover the limits of your life, and realize that nobody’s gotten’ this far by themselves. It’s a sign of maturity - the realization that you can’t live life alone. You may take the credit for it, brag on it a little bit, but you didn't do it alone. We need grace just to live day to -day, minute-to-minute. No man is an island.

But, the world tells us: “Do whatever you *want*.” *Jesus* says, “Live as *I* lived.” The *world* says, “Mind your own business!” But, *Jesus* says “There *is* no such *thing*! The world says “Get” ...*Jesus* says, “Give.”

After that race in Barcelona, Derrick Redman’s father was asked why he did what he did. “Because,” his dad said, “we started this together, and we’re gonna’ finish this together...”

And *that* is the message of the Resurrection. Amen.

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