

John 21:1-19

Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

A thought came to me this week that I want to share. Now trust me, this is anything but profound. So you don't have to be sitting on the edge of your pew and please don't pull me aside after the service and suggest that I might want to consider reading a bit more deeply, if this is all I can come up with. Here it is...people and society tend to be a pretty self-focused. See, I told you. Nothing new there, right? Well, let me take just a few minutes to try to explain how our Gospel passage, or a portion of our Gospel passage, brought that thought to my mind.

People and society tend to be pretty self-focused. It is arguably true. Everything we do is focused ultimately on self. Economics. Education. Entertainment. Maybe, even religion. Why that is true could fill a library, both secular and theological.

We have a huge industry, industries really, that prove that society is devoted to self-awareness. Just Google it and you will see what I mean. Self-awareness, and self-improvement, and self-understanding seems to be the goal of human existence. It is all about what goes into and out of individuals. We are so entrenched in that effort that it is truly hard us to see from any other perspective. As one site explained it, "Self-awareness is the first step in creating what you want and mastering your life." It adds, "Where you focus your attention, your emotions, reactions, personality, and behavior determine where you go in life." In a nutshell, it is saying that self determines your reality, which in turn defines self.

They continue, saying, "Self-awareness is developed through practices in focusing your attention on the details of your personality and your behavior." It is all about self ...and for \$99 they have a series of lectures to help you master it all, supported by access to a \$15 Emotional Release Exercise, a Spiritual Journey to Mexico, and a workshop up in Richmond. And, of course, if you are not able to make any of those, the audio will be available online for a reasonable additional fee.

So, what's my point? What was it from our Gospel passage that took me down this path of self and self-awareness and how our world seems to be ruled by it? It certainly wasn't the part where Jesus pushed Peter three times about his love for the Risen Christ. It wasn't even the change of net position during their fishing or the cookout on the beach with Jesus.

What stopped me, at least this time, was verse 12. The man on the beach had given them their fishing instructions, Peter had yelled out that it was the Lord, and he swam ashore. The rest had joined him via the boat and had been invited to breakfast. And then, encountering the man on the beach, it said in verse 12 that none of them "dared to asked him who he was" ...because they knew. What a strange combination of words. They didn't *dare* ask, because they already knew.

That piece of the recollection stirred me up. Why did John include that? It had to have served some purpose, other than connecting the two separate stories. Could it have somehow been that verse 12 had something to do about awareness, but, since it doesn't pertain to the type

of awareness that we are obsessed with, it often gets passed by? Could it have been about perception...but is missed in our time because it is not about self-perception?

Here is what I mean. I wonder if the question, “Who are you, Jesus?” has become in our day, the unasked...and even the unaskable, question. Even worse than that, if our time is indeed caught in the loop of self; the loop where self determines reality, which in turn defines self, which results in our further creating a reality as it relates to self in order to understand self even more, etc. etc., you get the idea; if we are caught in that loop of self, can the answer to the question, if it was put to Jesus, even be received, because it comes from outside of our self-contained loop?

I know that sounds convoluted, but it is important. We can't understand a reality outside of our own creating, if we are not able to see, and even conceive, anything beyond self. You see, the disciples on that boat all knew Jesus, personally. They had spent three years being taught to push beyond themselves, or at least trying to. And so, they didn't ask the question, “Who are you?”, because they really didn't have to. They knew. They knew him, even if possibly the outward visibles presented a challenge. Their connection wasn't about how they felt. It was about what and who they knew. They had been with him. They had eaten with him. Heard the inflection in his speech, seen the expressions on his face, and experienced the love from his life. They had seen him, resurrected. They knew in a way that so much of the today's world doesn't, or won't.

Asking the un-asked question is important, maybe particularly important in our time, because it breaks the loop of self in today's world. The question is an invitation to that which is beyond ourselves, and our comprehension, to reveal itself. While the world wants us to embrace the philosophical words of Socrates and Plato that tell us to, “Know Thyself,” and through that find knowledge and understanding; God tells us to go beyond ourselves and to know Jesus and through that find true wisdom and the fullness of understanding.

So we can't leave the question un-asked. So let's take a minute here to ask it again. And let's allow Jesus, in his own words, answer it again for our time.

Jesus, who do you say are you.

1. I am the Christ, the Son of the living God. *Matthew 16:16* He is telling our time that he came from the Creator of all things and He came to fulfill a plan to restore things to their original state.
2. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. *John 5:5* Jesus is explaining that life flows in a natural direction. From the soil to the roots and into the vine itself. From the vine, the branches find life and through that life, they bear fruit. That is the way of God for our lives too. The Father to the Son into us so that, with the help of the Spirit we can bear fruit for the world.

3. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. *John 14:6*
4. "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life." *John 8:12*
5. "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies." *John 11:25*

But turnabout is fair play. Just as Jesus had questions for Peter, he also has questions for us and for the world.

1. Do you love me? Will you love me?
2. Will you love others?
3. Will you follow me?
 - a. Even if it leads to *the* truth, the truth of God's making not ours?
 - b. Will you follow me even if it leads to a cross?
 - c. Will you follow me even if it leads to true self, self as defined and intended by God?

The question, "Who are you, Lord?", if left un-asked can only lead to the answer un-received... "Who then are we?"

I suppose that it does come around to self after all.

Amen