

“What To Do Now”
Lewinsville Presbyterian Church
April 7, 2024
John 20: 19-31, John 21: 1-14
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Our scripture begins on Easter, evening on that day, which began with the empty tomb, Jesus appears to the disciples in a locked room in Jerusalem. He “stood among them” - the Greek is clear that it means to be in the middle, huddling them up like a coach in a March Madness time out, then offering peace, breathing Spirit on and into them, revealing his side and hand wound, and sending them with the power to forgive.

After which Jesus is off and at some point, Thomas is back, receiving a firehose of unbelievable stories from the disciples about what he missed. From which Thomas locks in on the detail of the wound and doubles down, *if I see that, and put my finger in the nail hole on his hand and, my whole hand in the knife wound on his side, okay, I'll believe.* The disciples have stayed put in that room, and it takes exactly one week for Jesus to return, huddle them up, offer peace, turn directly to Thomas, repeat his words back to him, let's go, finger, hand. Thomas proclaims Jesus as Lord and God, then Jesus is off again.

I wonder how long they stayed put after that, how long they waited in that room in Jerusalem hoping Jesus would come back. Another week? Longer? When that next Sunday came and went without a Jesus huddle, how long before one of them said what everyone was thinking, what do we do now? Jesus isn't dead anymore, but his appearances have not been predictable, certainly not controllable, Jesus can't be summoned like a genie with the rub of a magic lamp.

I grew up in the kind of sports watching family where superstitions and ritual were believed to impact a game. For example, during an important game, you only went to the bathroom when it was absolutely necessary, because if you were in there when your team scored, it was strongly suggested you stay there for the rest of the game. So, in a similar but opposite way, I wonder if the other disciples just kept sending Thomas out for all the errands, figuring Jesus might just be more likely to show up again if he's out of the room.

At some point, they stop waiting for him there in that room. What do we do now? They go home. They leave Jerusalem. At the beginning of Chapter 21 they are by the Sea of Tiberias, also called the Sea of Galilee. These Galileans have returned to a familiar shore. They leave the last place they saw Jesus – Jerusalem, to return to the very first place they met him – Galilee. Only not all of them, Pam only read 7 names in Chapter 21. Maybe the others stayed in

Jerusalem to play a little zone for spotting Jesus' appearances. We don't know. We do know that after going home, the next answer to *What do we do now?* was to do what we know how to do. I'm going fishing, Peter says. We will go with you, respond the 6.

A few years ago, they left their actual fishing nets for the metaphorical ones Jesus promised that would catch the hearts of people. Did that vision slip through their fingers at Jesus death, his non-deadness still being too confusing to grasp? They know what it feels like to grasp hold of a fishing net once again in their hands, to begin a night's work in darkness on the sea. Time in the dark to wonder how to make sense of what has just happened. Not just that the one they risked everything for, called savior, was killed on a cross as a Roman criminal, not just the empty tomb and the Jesus post-death huddles but all of it: the wedding wine overflowing, the thousands fed on a hillside, Lazarus raised from the dead, Jesus walking to them across this very sea in the dark telling them not to be afraid?

If Jesus showed up in that room in Jerusalem when they were afraid for their lives in the days after Jesus' arrest and death, maybe he'll show up again here when they are afraid that their lives have amounted to nothing and everything has gone back to how it was before they met him, because here they are, back at home, fishing in the dark. It's not even going well for them. No fish, empty boat, maybe empty of other things too: hope, direction, stable footing, a way forward.

Which is precisely when Jesus shows up. *Children, you have no fish, have you?* Nope. *How about the right side?* Tried it, but okay. Jesus doesn't announce himself in their midst with words of peace this third time. They only know it is him when nets overflow, when emptiness turns to abundance, when they are invited to a meal, to add their fish to those Jesus already has going on the fire, where bread is broken and given, and what they have to offer together becomes so much more because Jesus is with them.

Like we talk about in Acts in the Alcove, the disciples don't know what to do next because there is no playbook for what they are experiencing, Jesus is raised from the dead, and they know from deep in their souls that everything in their lives and the whole world is forever changed by this death-defeating, sin-forgiving, darkness-overcoming moment in time. But like, also, is it? The power dynamics around them are the same, small despots rule the day, religious leaders draw real strict in and out lines, the hierarchies of status – religion, work, class are still there?

So what do you do next when you know that a door to the kingdom of love and hope and healing and saving and redemption and grace and mercy is wide open now because you heard about it last Easter Sunday, but not everyone sees it or even wants it, and your problems are still your problems, and the world's brokenness remains? Even though the world was not changed for the disciples in the way they expected: Rome toppled, the Messiah bringing the

heavenly kingdom fully into the realm, they stake their lives on the belief that the message of Jesus rising from the dead transformed everything so much that there needed to be a new now, a next.

They knew a life changing, world rearranging thing happened when Jesus came out of that tomb, and they would figure out how to live into that truth by being found by Jesus together, by wanting him to show up among them, wherever they went, whatever they did. To the question, what to do next?

Here's another answer: I'm not sure it matters.

Lock the door and hide inside?

Miss out on something everyone else experiences?

Regroup to something or somewhere familiar?

Go back to doing what you know how to do?

while full of fear, or frustrating emptiness?

Fine, none of that stops Jesus from finding us.

Jesus finds you. Jesus finds us, he seems to have a preference for finding us when we are with others. Drawing us all in, calling to us, offering his presence, his peace. Even now, Jesus is gathering up the broken pieces of our lives and even the world and giving us in return the abundance of his presence, then he asks us to share it with him, each other, and the world.

What do we do now? Maybe we ask this instead;

What would it look like for Jesus to take the broken pieces of your life, our lives, and even what breaks our hearts in the world, and hold them close, and gather us in through that brokenness, until we become more whole, more together, until we see the abundance of his presence, that he offers, and when asks how we wants us to share what he gives with him, each other, and the world?

Let's do that next.