

Gone Fish'n

Sometime ago I recall seeing a bumper sticker that read, "I fish, therefore I lie." Like car salesmen, fisherman have gained a reputation for stretching the truth, sometimes bordering on pure fabrication.

Not being a fisherman myself, I've been told that the first rule of fishing is that you have to be smarter than the fish. The second is you need to be smarter than the Game Warden, which transitions into the story I'm about to tell.

One day a young man was returning home from fishing. He was stopped by the Game Warden as he was leaving his fishing hole with two large buckets of fish. The game warden asked, "Do you have a license to catch those fish?"

"No sir," the young man replied. "These are my pet fish."

"Pet fish?" the Warden asked. "What do you mean, pet fish?"

"Well," said the young man, "Every night, I take these fish down to the lake and let 'em swim around for awhile. Then, I whistle, and they jump right back into my ice chests and I take 'em home."

"That's a bunch of malarkey!" said the Warden. "Fish can't do that."

The young man looked at the Game Warden for a moment then said, "Here, I'll show you. Just watch."

"I've got to see this!" said the Warden.

The young man poured the fish into the lake and stood and waited. After several minutes, the Warden says, "Well?"

"Well, what?" replied the young man.

The Warden says, "When are you going to whistle and call 'em back?"

"Call who back?" asked the young man with a grin on his face.

"The FISH," replied the Warden!

"What fish?" asked the young man.

Fishermen are famous for their creativity and for stretching the truth. But one is thing for sure: they love fishing.

So it shouldn't surprise us that following that first Easter, Peter invited several of his fellow disciples to go fishing. After all, what else were they to do? True, they were ecstatic that they had seen the risen Lord, but so what? They were clueless what to do

next or where to go. They hadn't received any marching orders from the resurrected Christ.

As bizarre as it may sound, it was as if Easter and the three previous years they spent with Jesus had never happened. Uncertain what to do next, Peter and several disciples decided to do what they did best - what came easiest for them. They returned to their fishing boats and went fishing.

John tells us that their initial attempt at fishing was a bust. They fished all night and caught nothing. They may have had a good time bonding, but their efforts at catching anything was a dismal failure.

Then, as daylight dawned, they saw someone standing along the shoreline. None of them identified the Stranger at first. They had no idea it was the resurrected Lord.

Jesus called out to them, "Have you caught any fish?" They replied discouragingly, "No."

Then He called back, "Throw your net on the other side of the boat and you will catch some."

Now every fisherman will tell you that knowing the location of the fish is critical in catching them. Today some fishermen use sophisticated fish finders to locate schools of fish swimming far beneath the water. But the disciples had no such device.

So I imagine when Jesus instructed them to throw their net on the other side they chuckled to themselves. What a silly idea. After all, what difference would it make if they didn't move their boat? It may have made more sense had Jesus pointed them to a nearby cove, or told them to work their way down the shore a few hundred yards. But to throw their net on the other side of the boat? Come on, now. These were experienced fishermen, not amateurs.

What's surprising is that the disciples did as the Stranger told them to do without argument or delay. And what a difference! The net was so full they had difficulty hauling it in. That's when the light bulb went off in the disciple John's head. Realizing their catch was nothing less than miraculous, he gazed again at the Stranger and soon identified Him to be the risen Lord. In excitement he shouted, "It's the Lord!"

Hearing this Simon Peter jumped overboard and swam toward shore. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish. When they reached the shore they saw a charcoal fire with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus told them to come and have breakfast. John says that none of the disciples dared ask Jesus, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord.

The Gospel writer then tells us this was the third time Jesus appeared to His disciples following His resurrection.

Now what are we to make of this Gospel account? Other than learning this was Jesus' third resurrection appearance, is there a lesson to be learned? Is there something we should glean from this story? I suggest there is.

Like Peter and the others who went fishing, often the reality of the resurrection escapes us. Yes, we celebrate Easter with fanfare, jubilant hymns of resurrection, white lilies and colorful spring flowers. Yes, we listen to inspiring anthems accompanied by brass ensembles and sermons about new life.

But when Easter day is over, what then? What difference does it make? Has anything really changed? Clueless how to answer such questions, we tend to follow in the steps of Peter and the other disciples, returning to life as usual, doing what we've always done, doing what comes easy. We return to the status quo because that's what's familiar. That's what we know best.

But is the resurrection so shallow so as to be limited to a one day celebration? Is there no greater significance? I submit there is. There are three lessons we can learn from the resurrection.

First, the resurrection is about HOPE. But what is hope? **Hope is anticipating that the future will be better than the present.** Hope is believing that no matter how bad the situation appears at the moment, it's going to get better. Hope is the antidote to gloom, which if left untreated, leads to hopelessness.

Hope is seeing the glass half full rather than half empty. It's believing that cancer can be cured rather than accepting cancer to be a death sentence. Hope sometimes is believing against all odds, like the Pirates making it to this year's World Series, or the Eagles winning the Super Bowl, or that the resurrection of Christ was an historical event.

Hope is not the product of fact or reason. Rather, it's spiritual in nature. Hope is the child of inspiration. Sometimes hope makes sense, while at other times it appears senseless and unfounded. In any case, hope is the fuel that drives us forward against all odds, believing the impossible is possible. Hope is the antidote that prevents us from giving up no matter how many times we fail.

The resurrection of Christ is significant because it gives us hope.

Hope not only in a life after death. But hope that in Christ all things are possible, even when they seem impossible. That's why the Apostle Paul wrote in his Letter to the Philippians these words: ***"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*** (*Philippians 4:13, KJV*)

The resurrection is iconic in that it reminds us that Christ is able to do all things. When feeling discouraged, alone or defeated, Christ's resurrection give us cause to hope.

Second, the resurrection is about transformation. **Transformation - by its very nature - is about change,** a word many of us dislike. The very idea creates in some a negative emotional response. But as we all know, not all change is bad. Some change is good, even welcomed.

As the disciples were soon to learn, Jesus' resurrection changed everything. The landscape with which they were familiar was drastically altered forever. Because of the resurrection, no longer would they be fishermen, but fishers of men.

The resurrection is inherently about change. Not just minor tweaking, mind you, but major, radical change. It's about total transformation reaching to the very core.

Listen to the words of the Apostle Paul as he described the nature of the resurrection in his 1st Letter to the Corinthians.

“This is how it will be when the dead are raised to life. When the body is buried, it is mortal; when raised it will be immortal. When buried, it quickly decays; when raised, it will be beautifully and strong. When buried it is a physical body; when raised it will be a spiritual body.... For what is mortal must be changed into what is immortal; what will die must be changed into what cannot die. (1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 53).

For the Christian, hope gives birth to transformation. Our hope in the resurrected Christ creates in us a willingness to change and be made anew. No longer satisfied with the status quo, we yearn for the new creation Christ offers us.

That's why the Apostle Paul writes these words in his 2nd Letter to the Corinthians: ***Anyone who is joined to Christ is a new being. The old is gone, the new has come.*** (2nd Corinthians 5:17)

It's a mistake to think of the resurrection as preserving the *status quo*. That was the mistake Peter and the disciples made when they decided to go fishing, as if Easter never took place. By its very nature the resurrection is about change, the anticipation of something better than what is.

Lastly, the resurrection is about faith. The best definition of faith I know is recorded in the book of Hebrews: ***To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see.*** (Hebrews 11:1)

Faith is about trust. Faith is about feeling secure and confident that something in particular will happen. Faith is not a guarantee, but a sense of conviction and assurance.

Faith is the reason we hope. We first believe, then we hope. As Christians, our faith is in the resurrected Christ. We have faith that the One who conquered Death walks before us, leading us. We follow Christ by faith, confident that He knows the way better than us, and that He knows what is best for us.

That's not to say we won't know times of defeat or discouragement or feel pain. Following Christ is not a guarantee our way will be painless or without difficulty. It does suggest an assurance that Christ walks with us through good and bad times, and that He will not desert or fail us.

As Allison continues to chart a new course for her future, we must continually remind each other that we are an Easter people, a people of the resurrection. Because of the resurrection our hope is for a future that is better than the present. We stand ready to

be transformed by the power of the risen Christ. And we walk by faith and not by sight, trusting that the resurrected Christ leads the way.

Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through the resurrected Christ!

Amen