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Operation Easter People

Passage:

Philippians 3: 2-12

John 21: 1-14; 15-17

What do we do in the weeks following Easter? This thought came to me as we approached Easter a few weeks ago. We are in what is called Eastertide and today is considered the 3rd Sunday of Easter.

My thoughts took me to preparedness and how our military remains in preparedness to be called to active duty for various reasons. While there are many military activities that have taken place over the years that began their name as “Operation”, the one that came to my mind was “Operation Desert Storm”. This was a coalition of forces from 39 countries to prevent a take over by Iraq of Kuwait. Kuwait was liberated within 100 hours of the start of Operation Desert Storm and the mission turned to humanitarian relief.

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There was a preparedness by all the countries involved in this event. In the same way you and I as Easter People are called to be prepared, to live out the resurrection of Jesus in our lives daily. This is a journey taking us from the cross until the day we reside with Christ in Heaven. Jesus calls us to live out His resurrection, leaving our old self behind.

Let's examine our text from John 21:1-14.

21 After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and in this way He showed *Himself*: ² Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the *sons* of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. ³ Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing."

They said to him, "We are going with you also." They went out and ^[a]immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing. ⁴ But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Then Jesus said to them, "Children, have you any food?"

They answered Him, "No."

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⁶ And He said to them, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find *some*.” So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish.

⁷ Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on *his* outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea. ⁸ But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far from land, but about two hundred cubits), dragging the net with fish. ⁹ Then, as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish which you have just caught.”

¹¹ Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not broken. ¹² Jesus said to them, “Come *and* eat breakfast.” Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, “Who are You?”—knowing that it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish.

¹⁴ This *is* now the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead.

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We don't know the exact timing of these events, but we do know for sure that they took place in the days following Jesus' resurrection, possibly within a few days as we are told this is the 3rd time, He showed himself to His disciples.

We have the benefit of knowing from scripture the going on of the time following the resurrection, but what if we were one of the those witnessing the events in person? What kind of questioning would be running through our minds? Would we have been able to put two and two together having been under Jesus' teaching for three years, or would our expectations and emotions cause us to react differently with our understanding of His teaching causing us confusion?

I'm going to suggest that maybe this is where Peter and the others with him were, so Peter finds something of comfort to himself. He decides that he is going fishing, maybe so he can give his mind a break from all the events, but also to pull himself together doing something that he knows about. I can imagine that Peter may have wanted to be alone during this time, but the other disciples were possibly hurting too.

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They saw a fishing excursion as a means of comradery, of trying to make sense of everything while supporting each other. It must have been a very long night. I've had those times of fishing when nothing is biting. It gives you plenty of time to think. I wonder what their conversation may have been like?

How would your thoughts and conversation had been? Can you picture Peter thinking about his denial of Jesus and how that might be burdening him now? And how about falling asleep in the garden, why couldn't we just keep watch while Jesus prayed? Were they possibly blaming themselves for some of the events that took place even though Jesus had prepared them in their time together? What did they not understand?

And then as dawn begins to break someone calls out to them to see if they have any fish. He tells them to try the other side of the boat, so they do, and their net was filled. John recognizes that this person is Jesus and tells them. Peter could not wait and gets out of the boat to swim to shore while the others drag their net behind the boat. When they reach shore Peter grabs the

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net and drags it out of the water. I wonder, were they dumbfounded or excited. Once again Jesus reveals Himself to them, He invites them to sit and cook some fish and have breakfast with him.

It is during this time that Jesus reassures them. He specifically has a one on one with Peter.

John 21:15-17

¹⁵ So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, *son* of ^[b]Jonah, do you love Me more than these?”

He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I ^[c]love You.”

He said to him, “Feed My lambs.”

¹⁶ He said to him again a second time, “Simon, *son* of ^[d]Jonah, do you love Me?”

He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I ^[e]love You.”

He said to him, “Tend My sheep.”

¹⁷ He said to him the third time, “Simon, *son* of ^[f]Jonah, do you ^[g]love

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Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?”

Here again I wonder if Peter’s thoughts were going wild on him. He just spent the night trying to come to grips with some of his decisions and actions and may have felt that he worked some of that out in his mind, after all when he realized it was Jesus at the shoreline, he could not contain himself and jumped ship to get to him as fast as he could. Now Jesus is asking him repeatedly if he loves Him.

This is where we are today, this 3rd Sunday of Easter. How are we remembering His resurrection? Are our actions and our thoughts saying that we do love Him? In these few interactions with Peter, Jesus has given him what living out His resurrection looks like. Feed my sheep.

This is what Operation Easter People is all about. Living a resurrected life is leaving our old selves behind. We are to be living in preparedness, ready to care and tend to those who need to witness the of God.

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I was reading a blog the other day on willingness posted by OnAssignmentbyGod.com. Here is some of what they were sharing.

“A word that the Holy Spirit brought into my remembrance this morning was willingness. I heard it echoed yesterday at the funeral a lot about my Uncle in how willing he was so serve. And it made me so happy to hear how solid my Uncle was in his willingness to serve, no matter where he was.

This morning, I looked up the word willingness. The definition of willingness is, **the quality or state of being prepared to do something; readiness.**

In my journal I wrote down:

- A willingness to be obedient.
- A willingness to serve.
- A willingness to pray.
- A willingness to study God’s word.

When you take the word willingness and replace it with the definition of that word, it gives more of an instructional tone. Watch what happens when I change the word willingness out and use the definition:

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- A **readiness** to be obedient or **being prepared** to be obedient
- A **readiness** to serve or **being prepared** to serve
- A **readiness** to pray or **being prepared** to pray
- A **readiness** to study God's word or **being prepared** to study God's word

The Holy Spirit said to me: *Being willing to obey is the first step, but obeying is actually taking the first step with your movement. Actually obeying is really what you want to be even more willing to do!"*

Jess knows our hearts and the enemy knows where our hearts are also, and is waging attacks on us. I know for myself that Satan has been trying hard to deter me from sharing what I was feeling God wanted me to share today. Like Peter, I found myself finding familiar things to do, to try to clear my head. Then I would sit quietly with God, and I would be reminded to live out Jesus' resurrection. It has been a back and forth for the past couple weeks.

While we celebrate Jesus' resurrection on Easter Sunday, we are called to so much more. The resurrection should be something that is celebrated each day of our lives. While we will have our failures, the resurrection is a call to willingness to

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serve, preparedness, a readiness. Willingness is a condition of our heart. It is the condition of our heart that God is interested in.

In sharing my thoughts with a colleague of mine he shared with me some practical things about our hearts. A few years back he was on a project and met someone from another company working the same project. They had hit it off in conversation as they would sit for lunch and break and found that they had a commonness in their faith walks. My friend had walked around the corner to begin his break and found the other person already there. He kind of entered by surprise to the guy who immediately had put a cigarette out and laid it next to himself on the floor. My friend had seen this and went over and picked it up and handed it back to him and told him that he didn't have to stop or him. This man had shared that he had tried many things to quit smoking, but nothing seemed to work. My friend has a way of sharing Christ to someone without you even realizing it and I believe it happened that day. He explained to this guy that when we have heart issues that require surgery that we are put in a place of immobilization and laid on a table or the surgeon to repair our hearts and give us another chance on life.

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He shared with this man that God isn't concerned so much about him smoking as He was about the condition of his heart. He suggested to this person that he allow Jesus to be the healer of his heart and lay in stillness allowing the Great Physician to do His work. That was the last day they were on the project together and two years had gone by before he saw him again. This person was so excited to see him again and want to share some news with him. He carried with him evidence of his smoking habit with a date marked on it from two years earlier and told him that after their talk he went home and laid in stillness and quietness to allow God to heal the condition of his heart and has not smoked since that night, but carried the evidence with him so that when able he can use it as a witness to others. My colleague calls this a practice of heart searchery. A quiet time allowing God to search and heal the real issues that are bond up inside of us.

As we prepare to close this morning I would like us to consider the condition of our hearts. Do we need to have some time for heart searchery. Can we live in the resurrection today, tomorrow, the day after that, and the day after that? What would living

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in the resurrection every day look like? Are our hearts willing? Can we be in a spirit of readiness, of preparedness for what might come our way.

I have been dealing with losing employees over the past year and it has taken its toll on me. Last week I found myself in the situation of possibly losing my project manager. While he is taking his time to make a decision and awaits a 2nd interview with someone else, the news shocked me, and I was angry. I did not show my anger towards him, but I was angry within. I needed Christ to intercede on my behalf and I spent time in what I will now call heart searchery. What I found myself doing was praying that Christ would reveal himself to my project manager and grant him success and satisfaction of mind in what ever way his decision would tale him. I found myself praying that as the employer losing someone that I want to maintain, that I would support his decision and treat him fairly. I took the opportunity to remind him that the business is not mine but is in fact Christ, and that I am just here to steward it. My project manager is not a believer, and I needed to use the circumstance to bear witness of Christ in all aspects of me life.

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Chestnut Grove is in the middle of a change, from old to new. We as a church are called to live the resurrection. As we move from the United Methodist Church to the Global Methodist Church we are called to be prepared and willing as an Easter People. Your leadership team has had to struggle and work through the process and demands placed on us, and it has brought some discontent among us about the United Methodist. But what the resurrection is all about is us being able to move beyond our discontent and lift our fellow brothers and sisters in prayer, and to pray for healing in Christ church.

We are all called to service for Him. We are to respond to what is going on as a changed people leaving our old selves off bitterness towards the process behind and get on with sharing God's light, feeding and tending His sheep, and witnessing to those that need to hear and see the love of Christ.

Jesus said to feed His sheep. That means living out His resurrection as an Easter People ready for active duty. Changed from our old selves to being empowered by His Holy Spirit.

Just as our doctors diagnose and treat the conditions of our physical hearts, God knows the

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conditions of our spiritual hearts. Even in our failures, He knows where our hearts truly are. He desires for us to allow Him to tend to the illnesses of our spiritual hearts so we can live in His resurrection glory.

Jesus' word to Peter to feed His sheep is a call to us today to be prepared and be in a spirit of readiness as Operation Easter People.

Let's Pray