

**Third Sunday of Easter**  
**John 21**  
**May 5, 2019**  
**The Rev. Dr. Mark W. Jennings**

I've been thinking a lot about family dynamics lately. I'm sure it's a lot because of my own family, but there's a lot going on here in Scripture as well. Peter and John are the main characters among the disciples in this story, but it is interesting that neither of their brothers are mentioned. Gathered that day by the Sea of Galilee were Peter, and Thomas, and Nathanael. Then it says also there were the sons of Zebedee and two others of the disciples. We assume that when the writer later refers to "the disciple whom Jesus loved," he means John, but we're not 100% sure. And what about his brother? And what about Peter's brother. These two sets of brothers were the only brothers among the Twelve Apostles, but where are James and Andrew. James is there, he's one of the sons of Zebedee, but the writer doesn't use his name. And was Andrew one of the other two? Why not mention him? He was a fisherman too. But in our scripture there is a story of Peter and John. If we read ahead to the early years of the church in the Acts of the Apostles, it is these two who are the leaders of the Christians in Jerusalem during the years after Jesus was raised. But what about the other brothers? What about Peter's brother Andrew? He just drops out of the story. The Bible doesn't say anything more about him. Legend has it that in later years he traveled about the Mediterranean world preaching the good news of Jesus, but while he was in Greece, he was arrested and crucified on an x-shaped cross. According to some stories, in the fourth century some of his bones were taken by a later disciple to Scotland where they were buried. That's why the patron saint of Scotland is St. Andrew and why the Scottish flag is an x-shaped cross. But he is absent here. So is John's brother James. And he doesn't come up in the Bible again until Acts Chapter 12 when he is killed by King Herod. But Peter and John are the more famous of the sets of brothers.

So it is interesting to me this breakfast that some of the disciples have with Jesus. Lots has been written about the encounter with Peter that morning. It's some days after the resurrection and the

disciples have left Jerusalem. We don't know why, maybe they just decide that they wanted to go home for a while. So they go back to Galilee, back to what they know, back to fishing. They take the boat out, maybe to fish, maybe to talk, maybe to think about all that has happened in the last weeks: controversy, trials, floggings, arrest, betrayals, denial, death and resurrection—and a lot of questions and confusion. They are simple men, they don't know about all these things, what they know is fishing. So they take the boat out, these fishermen, and great fishermen that they are—they catch nothing. So they are about to bring the boat back in as the day is breaking and a voice calls to them from the beach, “Catch anything?” Stupid question, it's what everyone wants to know “What did you catch?” But they bite their tongues lest their frustration come out and they say, Nothing. That's when this stranger tells them to put the nets down on the other side of the boat. As if they haven't tried both sides, but they do it and the net is so filled with fish that it would swamp the boat if they tried to haul it aboard. So they pull it behind them as they make for shore, already knowing that this is no stranger on the beach, it's Jesus. When they come ashore they find that he has breakfast prepared for them on the beach. They eat together, fish and bread, and at some point in the meal, Jesus turns to Simon Peter and says, “Simon, do you love me more than these?” More than what, more than who? Does he love him more than the other disciples love Jesus? Or does he love him more than he loves the trappings of his old life—the boat, the nets, the fish? Simon responds, “Yes, I love you.” Then Jesus says, “Feed my lambs.” Whatever that means. Then he asks again, “Simon, do you love me?” Peter says, “Yes, you know that I love you.” And Jesus says, “Tend my sheep.” And then Jesus asks again, “Simon, do you love me?” He asked the same question again, Peter thinks, what's going on? He's asked me if I love him three times—Oh my God, three times, he's asked me three times . . . On the steeple of our church is a rooster, a weathercock that turns with the wind. But it is there as a reminder, a reminder of that darkest of nights when after he had affirmed his loyalty to him, Jesus turned to Peter and said, “the rooster will not crow this morning until you swear three times that you don't even know who I am.” Three times. And now Jesus asks three times, “Simon, do you love me?”

He's being given a second chance. Is that a good idea? Peter ran away when Jesus needed him most. He not only ran away, he denied that he even knew Jesus. When push came to shove, he chose to save his own skin rather than stand by his friend. But Jesus gives him a second chance. And Peter takes it. With a broken heart he says, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you." And Jesus says, "Feed my sheep."

Jesus has forgiven him. And he's given him something to do—take care of the other disciples, those others who follow Jesus. But notice what Peter does now—he turns and looks at John and says to Jesus, "Lord, what about him? What about this man? What does he have to do? What's going to happen to him? Aren't you going to give him a job to do too?" What about him? What about her? How often is that our excuse. I've been thinking about this passage this week because as you know, I was going out to Oregon tomorrow to see my mother before she passed yesterday. Mom lived with my brother Ken and his wife Kris. And all of her care has fallen to them. But as Mom has gotten sick, my other siblings and I have had to make decisions about whether or not we are going to try to go and see her. She's been pretty insistent that she doesn't want us to come. So for the past couple of weeks, I've been debating, do I go out and see her anyway. And I finally decided that I would. So last Sunday I told her and told my brother that I was coming. But she passed before I could get there. And through all this I am learning that I can be very judgmental. Constantly, I want to use the words of Peter—what about him? What about her? My older brother and sister decided not to go or decided that they weren't able to go. All the time I debated, should I go? Mom may not know me by the time I get there, will it make any difference? And what about them? They're not going. Why should I feel like I'm the one who should be going? What about them?

What I'm discovering is that each of us needs to do what God is calling us to do, what is right for us, and that we can't judge the decisions of another. This was my decision. God bless what my siblings decide. But how often do we do that? What about him? What she did was worse? We see that in politics all the time? This person that we like does something wrong and immediately we think, well,

what about that one? Wasn't that worse? Our country makes a mistake, do we own up to it or do we like to look around for another country who does something worse—at least we're not like them. God calls us as a congregation or a denomination to do something hard, to take a stand. Do we do it, or do we ask, what about them? What about that church down the road, what about those Methodist or the Lutherans or that other church, they're not doing this, why should we?

As I've said, over the last year or so as my mom has gotten weaker, the care for her has fallen to my younger brother Ken and his wife Kris. And through all of this, the hospital stays, hospice care in the home, taking care of mom's personal needs, Ken has never called me up and said, why aren't you helping? Why do I have to do all of this? Don't you know how hard this is? What about you? Not once.

God calls to each of us. And it is up to each of us to listen to Jesus words, "Follow me." And to try, try to avoid judging the way someone else is following Jesus. But instead to ask God's blessing on their path.