

Sermon: "Living Outside Your Comfort Zone"

Year C, Easter 3

[Acts 9:1-6 \(7-20\)](#); [Psalm 30](#); [Revelation 5:11-14](#); [John 21:1-19](#)

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Ann Desrochers

When my children were much younger we used to frequent Air Shows. They loved watching the USAF Thunderbirds roar over head but were even more fascinated by the parachuters. I remember my son announcing at the ripe old age of five, that he really, really wanted to jump out of a plane and float in the sky like that. Of course, I remember because it was all I heard about for the next thirteen years, until he was legally old enough to sign the risk waiver to participate in such an activity. For his eighteenth birthday I did get him a gift certificate to Pepperell Skydive and he jumped out of an airplane with a smile a mile wide. He loved the adrenaline rush. On her 21st birthday, my daughter followed suit. Despite their urging that I might do the same thing for one of those milestone birthdays, my feet have remained firmly planted on the ground.

I am just not a big risk taker, in most anything: financial investments, career moves, or my personal life. On the other hand, I have an inspirational quote sitting on my desk to remind me, "A comfort zone is a beautiful place, but nothing ever grows there." Children tend to be natural risk takers. They do push the boundaries and that is how they learn and grow. As adults, I think we have acquired a fear of failure. That fear sometimes holds us back. Intellectually we know if we never step outside our comfort zone we limit our potential for growth and transformation.

Yet we find there are some benefits to living in our comfort zone. Clinging to our familiar routines provides a sense of security. Life is predictable, repeatable. We know what to expect. There are no surprises. The structure and order of a routine tends to keep our anxiety and stress levels low.

I imagine that the disciples in today's scripture lesson from John were looking for that safe place found in the routine. They had just been through a time that can only be described as emotional rollercoaster. First there was the emotional high of Jesus entry into Jerusalem, a Passover meal unlike any other, intense drama in the Garden of Gethsemane, denials and betrayal, an arrest, trial, and finally a brutal execution. When all their hopes have been dashed and you think they just can't take any more, there is news of an empty tomb and the resurrection appearances start. They are in a state of emotional overload. We have all had those seasons in our lives when we are on an emotional rollercoaster. Those times when one day you are going to a baby shower celebrating new life and the next moment you get that phone call only to learn that someone you love has been diagnosed with a terminal illness. You just went through a layoff, at the same time your young adult child lands their dream job.

All these emotions exploding inside us and we just want to scream "uncle", we've had enough and retreating back into the safety and comfort of a routine sounds pretty good.

So when Peter says, “I am going fishing” is it any wonder the other seven decide to join him. They go back to the familiar, a place of comfort, doing what they know – back to the Sea of Tiberius at their home in Galilee, to pursue their previous profession. They just want the security of the way things were before: the familiarity and comfort of their life before they were followers of Jesus, before the events of Holy Week, before the resurrection.

Now these men, whom we presume are very accomplished at their trade, spend most of the night fishing and it yields no results. These experts in their field, experienced fishermen, men who could probably catch a fish in their sleep, work all night and nothing – not a single catch. Based on what happens next, I would like to suggest that this scene in the story is telling us that once we have experienced something that has changed us; we can't go back to pretending we never had that experience. They try to go back, but things are not the same. Their old life, without Jesus in it, is now full of disappointment and discouraging results.

The story continues, dawn is breaking, and a lone voice from the shore calls out to them. They do not recognize it at first, but this man says, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” They answered him, “No.” He tells them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat. It is not clear why these experienced fishermen would listen to the advice of a stranger calling from the shore. But they do, and as soon as they do, they have more fish than they know what to do with. It is in that miraculous catch that the Beloved disciple immediately recognizes Jesus and announces, “It is the Lord”. The words are barely out of his mouth, when Simon Peter acts, exploding with excitement and passion, putting on some clothes, jumping into the water and swimming to shore as fast as he can. The others follow in the boat, dragging their overflowing nets.

Here we see two very different responses to the living Christ. On the one hand, we have the Beloved disciple with a quiet, discerning approach to recognizing the work of the Lord in the miraculous catch. On the other hand, we see Peter quickly jumping into action.

This is very similar to the two main characters described in the scripture from Acts. It was in a vision that the Lord told Ananias to go to Saul and establish him in the faith. At first Ananias takes pause, he thinks of Saul's evil past – Really, Lord? This man who has been out to destroy the disciples is the one you have chosen. But after a time of discernment, he trusts in God and obeys. Ananias and the beloved disciple are people of deep faith and can see the world in a new light.

Saul/Paul needs a little more active intervention of the part of God. However, like Peter, once they do jump into action it is with passion and purpose. They are the “doers”.

Both responses are authentic and genuine. All respond to God out of their human imperfection, they come as they truly are. They come before God vulnerable, with fears and doubts. But, when they are open to His call, they are transformed, and guided to use their individual, unique gifts to serve.

As our scripture story from John continues, they arrive on the shore, Jesus is there already preparing some bread and fish over a charcoal fire. He invites them to add some of their own fish and together they share a sacred meal, once again. Whether it is another resurrection appearance to the disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, or us having eyes to see in other ways, this scene reminds us Jesus is always with us, nourishing us, and leading us.

The story does not end there. When breakfast is over, Jesus calls to Simon Peter, and three times asks him if he loves him. And three times, Peter affirms his love for the Lord. I do not believe it is coincidence, but rather significant that Jesus asks and Peter responds three times. This can be seen as forgiveness for Peter's earlier three time denial of knowing Jesus. As Peter professes his love for the Lord, Jesus commands him to "Feed My Lambs, Tend My Sheep, and Feed My Sheep". As I told the children earlier, Jesus is about to "physically" go away to return to His Heavenly Father, and Peter, as a follower of Christ, is called to carry on his work by loving and caring for his people.

We, also as followers of Christ, are called to be a people of the resurrection, sometimes called to live outside our comfort zone. We are called to be a people allowing encounters with God to transform our lives. If someone as unlikely as Saul can have an encounter with the living Jesus and become a leader sharing the good news, then, we surely can trust in God, based on faith alone; we can believe without seeing; and we can love our neighbors as our self. We know that in following the Risen Christ we will have an abundant life. Amen.