

Jesus' disciples had been on an emotional rollercoaster with the events of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter. I'm sure they were overwhelmed. They were exhausted. And so they returned to what was comfortable...to what they knew best...fishing.

The Sea of Galilee represented a safe harbor for the disciples. For the ones who went fishing, it was what they knew. It was what they had done for years before Jesus had called them to follow him. They had made a living by catching fish. Now that Jesus was gone, they had returned to the safety of fishing.

Earlier Jesus had called them to follow him. They had been witnesses to miracles as those who previously couldn't now walked, the blind saw, the deaf heard, and the hungry were filled. They had the Scriptures opened to them through the teachings of Jesus. And they had seen Jesus come back from the grave, breaking the chains of death forever.

Jesus had called Simon Peter the rock, the rock on which Jesus would build his church. But Peter wasn't much of a rock when he denied even knowing Jesus three times before the crucifixion. But in today's gospel, Simon Peter is being given the gift of another day. This would mean another day to start to be that rock, to fulfill the vision that Jesus had. Dr. Wiley Stephens, a pastor from Georgia, calls this gift the "grace of a new day".

To claim the grace of another day, it is not enough just to say what we will do with it; we have to begin to live in a way that is molded by our faith. It is not enough for Simon Peter to declare his love for Jesus; he was told to feed the lambs of Jesus. You and I are given the grace of another day so that God's expectations for our lives can be met. We are given the grace of another day so that we can start each day anew and live out our hopes and dreams and calling.

The grace of another day is repeated over and over again in the Bible: When Abraham and Sarah were beyond the age of bearing children, Isaac was born. Moses was on the run from murder when he was called to go back and confront Pharaoh. Elijah was at the point of suicide when he was challenged by God, and Paul was confronted as he was on the way to Damascus to persecute the church when he was transformed by the power of God and built up the church like no other. Our Gospel today is a story of being given another day.

When life comes at us too fast, sometimes we need to pause and pray for and seek out the grace of another day. When we are given the gift of another day, we need to have the courage to use it as best as we can to do the will of God for our lives.

When God interrupts lives, as Jesus did with the lives of the disciples early that morning by the Sea of Galilee, it has a way of bringing us face to face with what we should be about.

We like to be comfortable in our safe harbors. We like to retreat into the comfort of what we know and do so well, as opposed to being challenged to grow and to follow. We like to look back instead of looking forward. Peter might have objected, "Let somebody else feed your lambs. Maybe I could just help if you can't find anyone else." But the gift of another day is the opportunity to put flesh and bones onto what we say we believe. It is the opportunity to live out our faith. The gift of another day is an opportunity to change.

When we come face to face with those things which challenge us, it changes how we see ourselves, how we see others, and how we see the potential of how God might work through us.

The grace of another day brings with it the challenge to change. Peter could no longer be comfortable easing back into fishing. He now knew the journey he had set out on was not over. He was being given the gift of another opportunity to become what Jesus had envisioned for him.

We who are followers of Jesus in this time and in this place need the gift of another chance. We need to stay committed to Jesus as we grow each day to be more like him. That isn't something that can happen in one day, but it is a task for all of our days. To be faithful to God is not easy. It isn't just wishing for a better world, but it is being ready to work for a better world every day, to realize that with each new day we are being given the gift of opportunity.

Putting God first in our lives and answering God's call is what we are to be about as followers of Jesus. You can hear the word discipline in disciple. God doesn't call us to retreat into our safe harbors --- our comfort zones -- but rather to use the gift of another day to be about the agenda God has for each of us.

Can you imagine for a moment as Jesus stood by the lake and looked out at Peter and the others fishing what he must have felt? Those on the boat were the heart of the team he had spent his ministry preparing to go to all the world with the Good News. Tears must have run down his face as he looked at them. He had formed them in the community to be his body. They were his plan to spread the word. But what was happening? They were spending their night fishing. Hadn't they heard anything? Was it all going to end here?

If we count the number in the gospel, there were seven of the original twelve fishing. Of course, Judas was gone, but four others had gone their separate way as well. Jesus had to be worried.

As the disciples came near, Jesus asked if they had caught anything. They said they hadn't. So he told them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat, which they did and were successful. Then they saw it was Jesus, and Peter in his excitement, jumped into the sea to get to Jesus, while the others brought the net filled with fish ashore. Jesus had prepared a fire to cook some of the fish for breakfast, and they shared bread and fish together.

Then Jesus turned toward the boat and the fishing nets the disciples had been using. That boat represented a safe harbor for Peter and the others that had gone out that night. It had been their life before they met Jesus. And now they were being confronted by Jesus, "Do you love me more than these?" Of course Peter said that he did. Then Jesus answered all three times, "Then show it." He called Peter to feed the lambs and tend his sheep. He was challenging Peter to be about what he envisioned when Jesus saw in Peter the potential to be the foundation of the church.

Peter had retreated to what was a safe harbor, and now Jesus was giving him the gift of another day to be faithful. There was still time for Peter to become the fiery preacher of Pentecost, to confront the high priest, the elders and the scribes as they assembled, to reach out to Cornelius, to be delivered from prison, and finally according to tradition, to be martyred in Rome.

You and I are being challenged to believe that not only can we have the grace of another day, but in that day we can change and, in changing, change the world around us. Each new day, Jesus is saying to us, drop your nets. Leave your boat. Get out of your comfort zone and follow me.

And even when we think that we have no more days, we know that even then, we are given the gift of a new day. Through his resurrection, Jesus broke the chains of death forever. He loves us with a love stronger even than death. When we are given no more days on this earth, we are given the gift of a new day, a day where we will be in the presence of God, where we will see God face to face, and dwell in God's house forever.

Amen.