

3rd Sunday of Easter

Peter was saddened that Jesus had asked him a third time if he loved him and he answered, lord you know everything. You know that I love you. Feed my sheep.

These lines from scripture have been playing in my head over and over this past week. Why, I wonder. In the midst of this joyful appearance of the Risen Jesus to his disciples, Peter is saddened at Jesus' question. Does that sadness come from Peter's remembering his three-fold denial of Jesus around a charcoal fire, notice that Jesus is making them breakfast around a charcoal fire? Does that sadness come from a realization that Jesus present with him on the beach will not be with him in the same way as he was before? This Jesus, the Risen Jesus is experienced in a new way, a recognizable way but not in the same tangible, immediate, flesh and blood way that he was before. Or does the sadness come from a question deep within. What does He mean, feed my sheep? What is he asking of me and can I do it.

This is one of those passages of scripture that just keeps on giving. There is such richness in it. Humanly and theologically. What's interesting is that it's really an appendix to John's gospel. Really we heard the end of John's gospel last week. Scripture scholars tell us that this passage was most likely written by one of John's disciples and added to the main gospel. Although it sounds like John, it also sounds like Luke. That's where we hear the story of the call of Peter and the multiplication of fish. Throughout most of John's gospel the humanity of Jesus is clearly secondary to the divinity. Unlike Mark's gospel where Jesus is so human that the experiences suffering like depression, rejection, fear, abandonment, John's Jesus is always in control. John's Jesus knows what will happen and does not seem to experience ordinary human emotion. The only exception to that I can think of is "And Jesus wept". But in this story in the appendix of John's gospel. Jesus is very human. The bonds of friendship are so powerful. You can sense Jesus' great joy in being with his friends. He's cooking them breakfast, walking on the beach with Peter, involved in a very personal and intimate conversation, the kind you would have with a person who is of ultimate significance in your life.

You can also see the "theology" of the passage. There are three moments that are emphasized and they are baptismal, Eucharistic, and mission. The lightly clad Jesus plunges into the water, (Baptism) Jesus feeds them (Eucharist) Jesus sends them out on mission. (Feed my sheep, my lambs). Those of us who accompanied the newly baptized on their journey toward baptism were privileged to see this three-fold manifestation of Christian life in this way. The sheer joy of coming to see Jesus and the power of his resurrection in their lives would equal Peter's joy as he jumped into the water, the disciples' wonder as they shared the meal prepared for them, and the

profound love that Jesus reveals in this three-fold question, Do you love me.

As I said this scripture passage keeps on giving. But what about Peter's sadness in the midst of all this joy? What about our sadness at the events of this past week at Virginia Tech? What about our sadness at the continuing violence we see and hear about in our city, our country, in Iraq and in so many other places. What is Easter Joy in the midst of such pain and loss? Does the scripture today that is so filled with hope and joy speak to the broken hearts of families and loved ones who lost their lives on the campus of Virginia tech? Will the presence of the Risen Jesus come to console those who have lost loved ones as he did to his first disciples to bring them consolation in the midst of loss and love in the midst of broken-heartedness? As people of faith, we hope and pray that this is what Jesus does. Jesus the Christ, human like us and the very essence of God comes to us where we need him but also asks us to be healing and hope and life for others.