

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Fifty years ago, April 8, 1966, a black cover graced Time magazine asking a three-word question: *“Is God Dead!”* *“It is a question,”* the author claimed, *“that tantalizes both believers who perhaps secretly fear that he is, and atheists, who possibly suspect that the answer is no.”* The article garnered a large and angry response. So here we are 50 years later, and what do we say? Shall our response be muted, for *“[w]e are in a very different world”*? No, I say. We sing out, *“Christ has triumphed! He is living!”* We do not fear that God is dead! We do not weep, for *“behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered.”* The *“Lamb, who was slain,”* lives! God was dead; Jesus Christ, God’s Son did die; the Lamb was slain; *“and by [His] blood ... ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and ... made them a kingdom and priests to our God”* *“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain.”* He lives and reigns. Christ is risen! Alleluia! He is risen, indeed. Alleluia! Alleluia!

So now what? We’re living in the glow of the resurrection event. We are Easter people. Now what? I mean we know what it means if Jesus hadn’t risen from the dead, if His flesh had rotted away, if His bones still lay in tomb. Then we’re pitiable people. Then, yes, fear for you are still in your sins, fear for when death takes hold of you, it is forever, fear for your adversary, the devil, is smacking his lips knowing that there is nothing keeping him from devouring you!

But indeed Christ has risen from the dead. The power of sin and death and Satan has been destroyed. So now what? I know! Let’s do what Peter, Thomas, and the sons of Zebedee did. Let’s go fishing! And I’m not talking about the lazy kind of fishing that the announcers and color commentators were talking about after last Monday’s NCAA championship game. Did you see it? They used a bit of Photoshop magic to put their heads on fishermen’s bodies holding up some big catches. It was funny, but for them, going fishing is something you do when work is done, and you have some time on your hands. It’s the same thought expressed by Mr. Duffy Bryant, the owner of Bryant Lumber yard in Batesville, AR, that I worked for one summer while in school. In his little radio program he was always expressing his desire to be out fishing, and ended his program with this little jingle: *“Gone fishin’, instead of just a wishin’; gone fishin’.”*

Today in our Gospel, Peter, the sons of Zebedee, and other disciples were in Galilee. Jesus had told them, *“after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee,”* and on the resurrection morn, Jesus reminded the women of His words, too: *“go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”* And so they did. But now what? I mean, Jesus had already told them they were being sent

out to forgive and retain sins. And He had told them, “*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*” So now what?

Peter decided. He said to the other disciples, “*I’m going fishing.*” And so they did—not the lazy kind, mind you, lying on their backs, napping, with a straw hat covering their faces, foxtail grass hanging from their mouths, and fishing line tied to their big toes. They were professional fishermen with boats and nets. They went fishing, and they would keep on fishing, but soon the catch would be different.

They went fishing, and indeed, in a miracle very much like the time He called Peter and Andrew, James and John into His service, Jesus shows them that He is Lord. For if you remember that previous time, the disciples had been fishing all night without success. And after hopping into their boat and teaching a bit, Jesus told them to go out to deep water and lower their nets—and their nets were filled. And Jesus said, “*from now on you will be catching men,*” or as St. Matthew records it, Jesus said, “*Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.*”

This time, calling out from the shore to the unsuccessful fishermen, Jesus said, “*Put your nets in on the right side.*” And again, the nets were filled. John made the connection right away. He recognized that it was Jesus on the shore. Peter jumped into the water and waded to the shore. There they all met and ate breakfast together. And when they had eaten Jesus reminded Peter of his calling to “*Deny himself and take up his cross and follow Jesus,*” feeding His lambs, taking care of His sheep.

I submit, we are much like the disciples we encounter in the Gospel lesson. We are people living in the glory not just of the cross and sins forgiven, but of the resurrection and life. We are Easter people. And that means fishing, though not lazily, in the kingdom.

It means, first, meeting the Lord where He has told us He would be. And that’s here gathered in His name, for He told us: “*where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.*” We’re here on the first day of the week, as on that first Easter morn and as the church began to do immediately, to acknowledge the ongoing Easter reality in heaven—that the Lamb who was slain lives and reigns with the Father and the Spirit. Seated at the right hand of God, He governs all things; and especially that He intercedes for us ... and the Easter reality on earth—that Jesus, the Lamb of God, serves us here with forgiveness, life, and salvation, by word and water and meal. Heaven and earth meet here around the Incarnate One, crucified but alive forevermore: angels and archangels and all the company of heaven join with lowly creatures on the earth and under the earth and in the sea, rejoicing in Him who is worthy “*to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!*”

Second, being Easter people means that we live in the ongoing reality of the resurrection received by our Baptisms. That is, we are called to wade in the waters of Holy Baptism daily—for in your baptisms you were not only united with Jesus in a death like His; you were united with Jesus in a resurrection like His—that’s more Easter language. That’s also why these words of St. Paul from Romans figure so prominently in our funeral rites—because funerals are about proclaiming resurrection victory in Christ Jesus. And the one who has endured in the baptismal promise—whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved—that person has overcome and won the victory.

Third, to live as Easter people is not to be weighed down with the notions that you’ve got to be someone special in order to be a successful fisherman in the kingdom of God, but to live in the joy of whom God made you and who He called you to be. You don’t have to be an Apostle, or a seminary professor, or a pastor, or a teacher in a Lutheran School, or another church worker to be called great in the kingdom of God. Indeed, those aren’t the ones Jesus calls great in the kingdom—rather they’re the little ones who believe in Him.

Discipleship is not about the grandiose things that we might try to do. Peter here today goes fishing, not because he was being lazy, but because, before Jesus had called him to something different and before Jesus had commissioned Peter and the others to “*go and make disciples*,” that’s what Peter did! And I’ll bet it’s not the last time he did it, either, although Jesus told him that his main calling was going to be fishing for men. Certainly Paul continued to work as a tentmaker as he carried Jesus’ “*name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel*” and proved “*that Jesus was the Christ*.”

Likewise, you have been given various callings in life: as husband or wife, son or daughter, parent, employer, worker, student, etc. From within these, you are called to speak of the resurrection hope that fills you as you are being carried along in the Holy Ark of the church. And in this way, you are doing what Paul did, and Peter too. You’re fishing, not lazily, but according to your callings. And remember, don’t be troubled if you don’t see success...you’re not called to fill the nets—just to drop them into the sea and let Jesus fill them.

Fourth, living as Easter people means living in the forgiveness that Jesus won by His cross, and that He bestows by His word and sacraments. That’s what Peter did in our Gospel—though he had denied Jesus three times in the courtyard of the High Priest, and had even wept in sorrow over it, nevertheless, he did not despair, but received Jesus’ restoration and absolution.

How many times have you denied Jesus—by your word or deed, by your silence or your failure to act? Be assured: Jesus’ forgiving and reconciling words

are not limited to three, but as many times as you come unto Him with your broken spirit and contrite heart—these He most assuredly does not despise.

Fifth, living as Easter people means answering Jesus' question, "*Do you love me,*" as Peter did: with an emphatic, "*Yes, Lord, you know I love you,*" and then doing as Jesus says. To Peter it was, "*Feed my lambs*" and "*tend my sheep.*" Peter had been sent as an apostle to do just this—and pastors are still to do this today. And hearers are to listen for the voice of the Good Shepherd. They are to abide in that word of the Good Shepherd proclaimed to us—both the rod of correction and the staff of comfort; to feed on the Bread of Life offered up for the life of the world, to eat from the table He has prepared for us and to drink from His overflowing cup. Surely those who love Jesus do not spurn His grace, but feast on it.

Sixth, living as Easter people means loving Jesus enough to do the hard work of loving the least of His brethren, loving those of the household of the faith, loving your neighbors, and loving even your enemies. That's not being a lazy fisherman, but that's throwing the nets where Jesus tells you. And you do it all the while confessing that the source of your love is the God who first loved you and gave Himself up for you, and confessing that, though your love in this world will be imperfect, you trust solely in the perfect love of God that through His Son will give you everlasting life.

Yes, we are Easter people; Christ is risen. Alleluia! He is risen indeed. Alleluia! Alleluia! God is not dead. Rather God died and rose again and promises eternal life to all who trust in Him. Moreover, by example it seems that Easter people go fishing—not lazy fishing along the muddy banks of one of our three rivers, but fishing for men, proclaiming Christ crucified and Christ risen from the dead, acknowledging our life in Christ is by word and water and supper, rejoicing in our forgiveness, and living in love of Christ and service to our neighbor. God grant that to us in the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.