

## “Ask for More”

2 Kings 13:14-21

John 21:1-14

In the Gospel of John, Jesus appeared to the apostles on the evening of that first Easter Sunday, but Thomas wasn't there. Then a week later, Jesus came to them behind closed doors and Thomas, too, was present. We don't know when how much time passed before this “third” appearance, but it probably wasn't too much time. He had breathed the Holy Spirit on them. He had exhorted them of the power of forgiveness over the power of sin. He had offered his body to them once more to touch and see that he truly is “My Lord and My God.”

Hearing and seeing and feeling all this, where do we find the disciples now? Back at the Sea of Tiberias, which is the Roman name for the Sea of Galilee. Jesus had preached and taught on that sea, he had walked on the water of that sea and calmed its storm. Goodness, he even called Peter, Andrew, James, and John to follow him at that very sea. He said, “follow me, and I will make you fish for people” (Matthew 4:19). Seven of the disciples are there – surely blessed and renewed and transformed and ready to change the world. And what do they do? Peter is their leader and he leads them away right back to those fishing boats. So, Thomas and Nathanael, James and John, and two others who don't even have their names mentioned – they go right ahead and they don't catch a thing. They've stalled out. They don't ask for much and they end up with nothing.

In our Old Testament reading we find Elisha on his deathbed. He was a prophet, a man of God who set up kings and deposed kings, he advised rulers and brought God's word to change the lives of the nation, that is, the northern kingdom of Israel. He parted the waters of the Jordan River and purified springs. But he didn't just wield miracles on a dramatic, national scale. He also fed crowds of hungry people during a famine and removed poison from a stew that people

had already started to eat. He helped one widow out of poverty and brought another widow's son back to life. He was a man on whom God's Spirit rested and who did his best to be faithful.

So, now he is dying and the king of Israel weeps because he needs Elisha's help in battle. He wants prophecy to be victorious, he wants to beat back the enemy from his land. How could he know what is pleasing to God without the voice of this dear prophet? Elisha tells him to shoot an arrow to the east out of the window. The king doesn't understand what's happening – neither the symbolism nor the significance – but he does as he is instructed. He shoots towards the east, towards the rising of the sun, towards the dawning of the new day, towards hope and beginnings. And Elisha calls it, “the Lord's arrow of victory.” This word victory means help, deliverance, or salvation. And the prophet's very name “Elisha” means “God is salvation.” They share the same root. What we have here is a prophet whose whole life has been about telling you “God is salvation,” “God is your help,” “God is deliverance.”

So, when this holy man tells you to take these arrows of salvation and strike them into the ground – how many times would you strike them? How many times would you add your arm to the salvation and love of God and take part in moving it from the heights of heaven to the solid earth below? Would you try it once and walk away? Twice a little sheepishly? Three times so you don't look like you're phoning it in? Elisha got mad with the king because he stopped – he gave up. Don't give up or look down or lose heart – ask for more because help is real, deliverance comes, and victory...well, it doesn't always look like we think it will. It doesn't guarantee us status or fame or material success, but it does draw us closer to God and one another. We have to ask for more.

A little more than three weeks ago, Lucus was at the pharmacy filling a prescription or two for me and browsing the soda aisle while he had to wait. Excuse me, I'm sorry – he was

wanting to buy “pop.” Now, Lucas is kind of particular about which kinds of “pop” he will drink so he was really diligently hunting around the store for the exact right brand at the exact right sales price. The way he tells it, he was pulling 12 packs off the shelves and peering in behind them so he could be absolutely, 100 percent sure that he got the pop that he needed. And, lo and behold, he asked for more and he found more – 4 12 packs of just what he was looking for.

He got three of them into his cart when a woman came over exclaiming, “oh, he found [what I was looking for]”! Lucas soon found out that she had been asking the employees if they had run out or not and they hadn’t been able to find any to help her.

Without thinking, Lucas said, “oh, no worries! There’s four left – why don’t we split them?” And he bent down and put two of the twelve packs in her cart to spare her the pain of bending over.

When Lucas went on to pay, the store manager walked up to the register. He said, “[you know,] there haven’t been many people in here today who have been nice to each other.”

Lucas said, “in these times, we have to stick together – there’s no more important time than when things are difficult.” Now, I don’t mean to brag on Lucas or embarrass him telling this story. But the manager was so touched by Lucas’s open-heartedness that he gave Lucas a fifteen percent discount.

Lucas asked for more – first, more soda (yes, I’m gonna say soda). First, for more soda because that’s what he thought that he wanted. Then, when a woman came to him in need – okay, not a life or death need – but it was a small thing to make her life a little bit better, a little easier to handle in that moment. When a woman came to him in need, he saw that more meant not that he would get all the soda himself, but that they could each share joy and community and connection with a simple gesture. Then, on top of that, the manager saw an act of kindness and

wanted to add to that with what he could provide. When we ask for more and we are open to the possibilities that the Spirit opens before us, more becomes more becomes more. But “more” isn’t about getting rich quick or measuring prosperity by crass, human standards. It’s about asking for more of the image of God within us – of the true essence of what it means to be human.

So we come back to the boat where Jesus tells the disciples once again to cast their nets. And the Gospel tells us that they caught EXACTLY 153 fish. This might seem like an oddly specific number. Some scholars believe that this was the number of different kinds of fish that people believed existed in the whole world back in Jesus’ day. So, not only is 153 fish a lot of fish for a little fishing boat to catch, but it’s quite possibly also every kind of fish there is – just because Jesus said to cast the net.

As they are struggling and struggling to pull the net into the boat, the apostle John says to Peter, “It is the Lord!” And Peter jumps out of the boat and heads right for him, leaving the boat behind. Because, really, Peter wanted more than fish – he wanted Jesus and everything that Jesus had promised. This time he wouldn’t sink in the water and screech out for help. This time he was going to make it all the way over to him.

By the time that everyone had brought the boat and the fish to the shore, Jesus was there having a beach barbecue – getting the fire all ready for a nice fish breakfast. None of them had the audacity to question it. They saw Jesus and they knew him. As they saw Jesus, they understood more and more that they had a higher calling. They had to keep faith and hope alive because of the salvation that Jesus offered them.

Sometimes when we get into times of tragedy and crisis, our prayers get uncertain, cautious, somehow smaller. Maybe we even pray less often because we don’t understand how God could be at work when we see things going wrong. Our expectations get lower and lower as

we start to lose hope. The temptation becomes to ask for less as we claim we're being more realistic. But sometimes "being realistic" is just a way to say our faith is getting shaky.

One of the hardest spiritual disciplines to master is to ask for more when we pray, but to do it in a selfless way. The first trick is to keep praying – you can't edit a novel that you've never written, you can't master a jump shot if you never get a basketball, you can't frost a cake that's still cake mix in a box. The second trick is to be honest. If you want soda more than anything else in the world – pray for soda. But the third trick is to let yourself be guided in prayer. Ask for what you want, put your heart and soul into it, but listen for the leading of the Holy Spirit because there is more out there. There is more than our selfish impulses and fear-based lashing out. If we keep our eyes and ears open, our prayers can be as large as anything and join our sisters and brothers in Christ and change our hearts one by one.

The last thing that Elisha said before he died was to scold a king for not catching God's vision of love and grace. And then even Elisha's bones were so filled with the spirit of life that a random man who was buried on Elisha jumped right back to life and rose to his feet at the mere touch of Elisha's bones. A miracle – incredible, surprising – a miracle that leaves us with so many questions. But it also points us to this prophet filled with God's love, challenging us to dream bigger to the glory of God's name.

So, when we pray, can we pray like we mean it? Can we meet Jesus for breakfast and pray every hope and be lifted with love every day? Can we ask for more from our God and believe that healing and renewal and restoration and new life will come somehow, someday? Can we pray knowing that we may not get exactly what we want, but that God's love and abundance are working in every facet of our lives? Can we pray like that? Yes, in Jesus' name, I believe that we can. Amen.