

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY, MAY 5, 2019

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

"To Lead & To Follow"

Based on John 21:15-19

One of my favourite story books as a child was Dr. Doolittle & the Pirates (Hugh Lofting), a misfit veterinarian who had wild adventures on the high seas while rescuing animals from pirates and natural disasters, rather like a United Nations Representative meets National Geographic meets the SPCA. My favourite critter in the book was an imaginary creature, rather like a two-headed lama called, the Push-Me-Pull-You. Of course, travel was difficult for this particular animal, because going in one direction always meant that the 'other end' of the critter had to do the exact opposite. Eating, sleeping, and escaping marauding pirates required co-ordination, communication, and cooperation.

So does leading and following.

The resurrection had come and gone. The hysteria in Jerusalem was dying down, and the Romans were no longer looking under every rock and earthen cellar for followers of the man named Jesus. There were whispers

among those who believed, and those who were curious about these 'misfit' Christians, that Jesus was alive. A few claimed they had seen Him, touched Him, talked with Him. But who was to say if it was true or not?

The disciples, now free from the clutches of the city, and prying eyes, had found a quiet spot by the water to rest, to mope about a bit, I suspect. Listless and overwhelmed, Peter headed out on to the water to fish, if for no other reason, then to distract him from his sadness, worry, and lack of direction.

Then he
said to him,
"Follow me!"
~John 21:19

And so, a second story of a great catch of fish appears in our Scriptures just prior to our lesson today, oddly similar to the first story found in the other gospels.

(see Mark 1:16-20, Matthew 4:18-22, Luke 5:2-11).

It would seem that:

Jesus + Disciples + Water = Large Catch of Fish

Also important here, a repetition of the familiar words from Jesus to His disciples: "Follow me!" (v19). The Gospel of John does not share this story of the great catch, at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, like Matthew, Mark and Luke, but close of the end of Jesus' earthly life, as He attempted to prepare the disciples for what would come next.

- Was it one story, shared by different writers at different times, designed to inspire disciples of every generation to leadership and obedience?
- Was it two stories, rather like the 'book ends' of Christ's ministry: a reminder that at all stages of the Christian walk, to lead others to faith, one must follow Him first?

Just something to ruminate on while having your lunch today.

Squished in between the pity party on the beach, and the resonating power of the words, "Follow Me," is a short

dialogue between Jesus and Peter. Peter, it appeared, was the most distraught of the bunch on the beach that day. Mind you, it was Peter who had publically denied Jesus three times, only a short while ago. Perhaps his guilt and shame was more intense than the other disciples, who had quietly hung their heads; carefully allowed themselves to get lost in the crowd; hiding before being recognized, in those difficult days of Jerusalem. Three times, Jesus confronted Peter and asked the same question:

"Simon son of John, do you love me?" (V15, 16, 17)

And three times, Peter replied,

"Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Absolution?
Forgiveness?
Literary attempt to balance or negate the three public denials in Jerusalem?
Yes, yes, yes.
But more.

"Feed my lambs," Jesus said.
"Tend (or take care of) my sheep," Jesus said.
"Feed my sheep," Jesus said, a final time.

An obvious push to move Peter into leadership? (v15)
A test of his resilience for what was to come? (v17)

A warning of the likely bad ending to the whole enterprise? (v19)
Yes, yes, yes.
But more.

Because the Greek word for 'feed' did not mean the same thing to Peter, as it means for us today.

"Feed" meant to quietly coax and gently move about the sheep (or people); 'walking with' perhaps; shepherding, rather than directing.

"Tending" was a lot more 'busy' or 'hands on': teaching, preaching, holding hands in comfort, praying, visiting.

A pushing forward, pulling back.
Inviting but not insisting
Leading by example, following God's direction

Jesus was testing Paul.

- Was he committed?
- Was he willing to finish the race?
- Would he follow, regardless of the outcome?

But Christ had more to say on the subject. He explained to Peter, that leadership is a lot more than being the boss, ordering people around, demanding results, hiring and firing. Leadership is about relationships, which must be nurtured with wisdom and patience and resourcefulness.

Sometime, leading, sometimes, following.
Sometimes, feeding, sometimes tending.

There are no guarantees in leadership, just exciting adventures with pirates and Push-Me-Pull-You's along the way.

So our Saviour asks of us in the Season of Easter, where all things are new, and the spring flowers remind us of the many possibilities life has to offer:

Are you committed?
Are you willing to finish the race?
Will you lead, and will you follow, regardless of the outcome?

Then grab your pirate hat and let's set sail on the adventure of a lifetime. And people think that the Christian life is dull and boring. If only they knew!

Ahoy mates!
Amen.