

"Gone Fishing"

Reflections on John 21 from a Social Distance

I've always thought of Holy Week a type of placeholder – count-down days that we quickly put behind us as we arrive at Easter. This year I'm able to appreciate Holy Week as it was experienced by those who were there – a time of great stress and uncertainty.

This is my go-to picture in times of stress and uncertainty. It's a photo of a rock formation on the Sea of Galilee, taken when Karen and I toured the Holy Land in 2017. It is said to be the place from which the risen Christ hailed the disciples who had fled back to Galilee following the devastating events in Jerusalem.

Karen and I have also become refugees, hiding from the COVID-19 virus in our rural East Texas vacation home with our daughter's family. Our grandson Grayson was born with a rare genetic condition that leaves him with a compromised immune system. Anything that comes into our house, including the mail and the vegetables for dinner, must be wiped down before handling.

So I can identify with those disciples as they struggled with sudden social dislocation and fear for their physical well being. They, like us, could only ask "what now," and they, like us, had no good answers. Peter, true to his ready-fire-aim temperament, declares "I'm going out to fish," and the others, lacking any other options, say "we'll go with you." That's where the risen Christ found them, in a boat, casting their nets for fish, but with little catch to show for their efforts. Two millennia later, we too are sitting in our respective isolation boats, casting our electronic nets for reassuring news, but with little catch to show for our efforts.

That's why I want to share this photo. It reassures me in two ways.

First, it reminds me we do not find grace, grace finds us. The fishing disciples had retreated to a remote, hard to get to place, but there was Jesus, the embodiment of God's grace, calling to them from a stone outcrop at the edge of the shore. Social distancing might separate us from friends, family, and economic security, but never from grace.

Second, I am reminded that even in this time of relative inactivity, I do have a purpose, a sacred purpose.

Immediately behind the scene in this photo is the place where Jesus cooked breakfast for the reunited group, and where Peter, trying to repair his standing with Jesus, declared his love three times. Jesus' unambiguous response, also repeated three times, was "Feed my sheep." In the midst of a pandemic, that means protecting the vulnerable.

Flattening the curve is a sacred act of purpose.

This photo is now the wallpaper on my phone screen. It surrounds all those news apps, still full of stress and uncertainty, with grace and purpose.



- Bill Kline