Last week in worship we read to the end of chapter 20 in the gospel of John. I mentioned then that most scholars assume that the end of chapter 20 was the original ending to the gospel of John. Let me read those last two verses again and you will understand why most people assume the gospel originally ended there.

**Read John 20:30-31**

In reading those words it’s not hard to assume that this was the original ending to the gospel of John. Chapter 21 could have been written by the same writer that wrote the rest of John or it could have been written by someone else who wanted to add to what John had written. The Bible is a living document which contains many books written over a long period of time.

In many ways chapter 21 is an epilogue to the rest of John. It could be argued that this chapter is the transition to the book of Acts which begins to describe what happens with the beginning of the early church. It can be argued that chapter 21 of John is really the beginning of the early church.

So, as we hear these words, I invite you to see this appearance of Jesus after his resurrection as the beginning words of instruction about the early church and, therefore, guidance to us now in how to be the church. Listen to this story as a foundational story of what it means to be a faith community today.

**Read John 21:1-19**

According to recent surveys, 86% of the people who are involved in a church community today are there because someone invited them. 86%. 86% of us are here not because the pastor invited you although he does invite people.

86% are here not because of our awesome website although I do know that most people will check out our website before they show up to try to find out more about who we are. That is why it is important to have a good website.

86% are here not because we are blessed with a pretty and historical building although it is important to maintain the buildings and the grounds to show that we care. 86% are here not because of effective social media advertising although that is very important to get the word out and reinforce what we are about and what we have going on. No, 86% of us are here because someone personally talked to us and invited us to be here.

And what are the basic reasons of why we are here? We are here because we believe that somehow, we are changed for the better by being a part of this faith community. We are here because we believe that the larger community is transformed in a positive way by what we do here. Basically, we are a part of this faith community because we believe that we are transformed by God here, and we believe that the community is transformed by God through us.

Bearing that in mind, let’s investigate this post-resurrection story that we have read this morning. In this post-resurrection story, Jesus reveals himself to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, also called the Sea of Galilee. At first, the disciples do not realize that Jesus is with them.

This story begins with Simon Peter announcing to the others that he is going fishing. Fishing was not a relaxing pastime but their vocation.

After fishing through the night, Simon Peter and the other disciples with him acknowledge that even though they have fished through the night they have not caught any fish. As the morning sun begins to break, Jesus stands on the beach, but the disciples do not recognize him.

Jesus calls out to the fishermen and acknowledges that they have not caught any fish. Jesus yells out, “cast your nets to the other side.” They follow his commands even though at the time they do not recognize that it’s Jesus. Making these changes and fishing in a different way, the disciples catch an abundance of fish.

As the fish are brought into the boat, it is only then that the disciples recognize who it is that has been giving them guidance. It is at this point that one of them proclaims, “It is the Lord.”

The disciples come ashore, and Jesus sits down to eat breakfast with them. The scriptures tell us that after they finish breakfast, Jesus asks Peter if Peter loves him. Peter, says, “Of course, I love you.” Jesus then responds to Peter by telling him to “feed my lambs, tend my sheep, and feed my sheep.” Jesus then says to Peter and to all the others and to us, “Follow me.”

At our Session meeting last Sunday, we talked about our next steps as a congregation. Our next steps as followers of Jesus Christ invite us to follow the guidance which comes to us from the 21st chapter of John.

If we are to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ, then we too must be willing to fish, not for fish but for people. We must be willing to feed, tend, and follow. Again, not lambs but people. So how do we go about doing that? How do we go about following what Jesus guides Peter to do and us to do?

At the Session meeting we talked about three questions that we will begin asking that we want the entire congregation to begin asking. These are questions that we want to ask one another within the congregation. These are questions that we want to ask people who are connected to the congregation through preschool and scouting. These are questions that we want to ask people who have no connection to the congregation.

The three questions are simply this: 1) What do you see as the needs in your family? 2) What do you see as the needs in your neighborhood or community? 3) What do you see as the needs in the larger world?

Why are we asking these questions? We ask these questions because of the interaction that Jesus has after his resurrection with Peter and the rest of the disciples. Jesus instructs them to feed and tend and to follow. We are also instructed to feed and tend and follow.

By asking these questions, we begin to understand what is going on within our families, within our community, and within the larger world. We cannot assume to know what is happening to one another. We must ask. We cannot assume to know how to reach out to others without first understanding what we are all experiencing in life.

These questions are our avenue into having deeper conversations with one another and with our neighbors. As we listen to others, we will be open to what God is saying to us. As we listen, we can figure out how to tend, how to feed, and how to be better followers of Jesus Christ.

The Session is working on a formal plan of how and to whom to ask these questions. The congregation will be able to talk about these questions at our next fellowship dinner on Feb. 19th.

We are working out the details to talk to school representatives, police, social service directors, and folks living near the church. We invite you to ask these questions of one another, of people you know, and, if you are really gutsy, people that you do not know.

As people around us engage with us and as we show that we really care about what they have to say, then we create those relationships where people become connected in an authentic way with this faith community and, most importantly, with God.

Again, 86% of the people who are involved in a faith community are there because someone invited them. As we ask questions and learn about what others are experiencing, then we are helping others to find a connection to this faith community and to God.

I pray that this is a time to ask questions and to listen to the answers. Really listen to the answers.

As we ask and as we listen, maybe we can catch a glimpse of what Jesus means when he says to feed and tend my sheep and come and follow me. AMEN.

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-Tidsworth, Mark, <https://www.pinnlead.com/blog/2019/4/30/your-churchs-best-publicity-ever>

-Given: May 5, 2019 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)