

It must have felt like Déjà vu. They'd seen this miracle before.

Three years earlier they were hard at work cleaning their nets on the shore of the very same Sea of Galilee. Fishermen by trade they had been up all night, they were coming to the end of their shift when this strange man walked up to them, got into Peter's boat, and asked him to put out a little from shore.

Peter, James and John didn't know this man from Adam, but they complied. It was then that they heard their first sermon from the mouth of a man named Jesus.

After he finished preaching he said to Peter, **“Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.”**

Peter replied, **“Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”**

And maybe you remember what happened next. They caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. They called their partners on shore who came out in with a second boat and filled both their boats so full of fish that they began to sink.

And this event that took place three years before what we just read in John 21 ended like this, **“When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, ‘Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!’ Then Jesus said to Simon, ‘Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men.’”**

Fast-forward again three years to John 21. It must have felt like Déjà vu. The minute they let down that net and tried to pull it up, realizing how full of fish it was, the memories must have come flooding back to that first day they met a man named Jesus.

In some ways, even though there are a lot of similarities between these two miraculous catches of fish, everything had changed in those three years. In that first account, the disciples had never met Jesus before. They didn't know who he was. They didn't know why he had come to this earth. They didn't know what the next three years would entail. They were fishing because that was their job.

In John 21, everything had changed. They knew Jesus. They knew why he had come. They couldn't and wouldn't ever forget the things they had heard and seen as they followed Jesus around for his three year ministry. And how could things ever be the same again for these men after what they had witnessed at the end of that ministry? How could they forget that special meal in that upper room, that tumultuous night in the Garden of Gethsemane, the fear, confusion, and terror that followed? And most of all, how could they forget what they had seen in that locked upper room three days later and again a week after that? When they watched a man some of them had seen die eat fish, when they put their fingers in the holes marring the risen Jesus' hands and side, everything had changed for these disciples. Easter changed everything (a theme you've heard me say over and over again the last few Sundays). In John 21 they were no longer fishing because that was their job, no they knew their job now was to spread the news of the amazing things they had heard and seen over the last three years.

In some ways everything had changed during those three years between these two miraculous catches of fish, and yet at the same time, it all seems remarkably familiar, doesn't it?

I mean, just look at Peter impulsively wrapping his outer garment around himself, jumping out of the boat, and swimming to shore – good old impetuous, extroverted, act and speak before thinking Peter – a passionate man of extremes who had lopped off the ear of that man in the Garden of Gethsemane, who had sworn up and down that he would never betray Jesus, only to deny him three times that very night, who had extolled Jesus as the **“Christ the Son of the living God”** in one breath only to rebuke Jesus a few moments later only to be rebuked in return with those cutting words from Jesus, **“Get behind me Satan.”**

Everything was different on this post-Easter dawn, and yet Peter, in a lot of ways Peter was still the same. In the very next words of John 21 there is a conversation between Jesus and Peter (I'd encourage you to read that when you go home today). In that conversation we see the very same confused, and frustrated Peter we see so often before Easter. Everything was different, and yet the more things change the more they stay the same right?

Everything was different for these disciples and yet there was an awful lot that was still the same. Peter and those other disciples had left that locked upper room in Jerusalem changed by what they had seen and heard (the risen from the dead Jesus), and yet they were sill sinners, weren't they? If you read the book of Acts you will find this same impetuous Peter putting his foot in his mouth again, years after that first Easter.

Easter – the more things change, the more they stay the same.

And isn't the same thing true with us?

Easter changes everything for us. I mean, I think back two weeks to Easter Sunday, my first one here at St. Paul's, what an amazing day! Who could walk away from those two, different, special, beautiful worship services, and not be changed, not be thrilled and excited by the beautiful thing we have in Jesus? How could we forget what it is like to sing those glorious Easter hymns on our new organ, and hear those beautiful, uplifting Easter readings after the quiet and somber 40 days of Lent?

This last Easter (and all the Easter's you and I have enjoyed before that) change everything for us, and yet on this post-Easter Sunday there is an awful lot that seems the same, as before this last Easter.

On Easter Sunday I preached to a packed, standing-room-only house, and, well, that's not the case this morning. Easter changes everything, but the attendance today is remarkably similar to all those Sunday's pre-Easter. And lest you and I pat ourselves on the back because we are here, it shouldn't take much self-reflection to realize that church attendance isn't the only thing that has gone back to its old habits on this post-Easter Sunday.

Easter (the message of our risen Jesus) has the power to set us free from every stress and worry and fear you have in this life. It has the power to set you free from the tremendous and overwhelming pressure of having to fix your broken life and this

broken world. And yet, while Easter changes everything, I'm betting that you, like me, don't need all that much time to realize how little our hearts have changed from just two weeks ago.

Easter – the more things change, the more they stay the same. When it comes to us and our lives, and how we are performing it's an uncomfortable and unfortunate reality, isn't it?

It's a frustrating reality, isn't it?

It's frustrating when we see a lack of change in other people. So, when Pastor Adams and I, who are your pastors (which means we are responsible to God for your souls), look out at a church that is half as full as it was two weeks ago, that's a frustrating thing.

But make no mistake about it, friends, that frustration isn't felt just when Pastor Adams and I look at church attendance numbers. No, no, there is more than enough frustration over a failure to change when I (we) look at my own heart and see all those old sinful habits that *I've* fallen right back into on this post-Easter Sunday.

Easter – the more things change, the more they stay the same. When it comes to us and our lives, how we are performing that is an uncomfortable and unfortunate reality. But we are not the only ones who are remarkably the same on this post-Easter Sunday. Just like Peter was not the only one remarkably the same in John 21.

So was Jesus...

In some ways Jesus had changed since Peter first met him on a boat three years earlier. In some way Jesus had changed since Peter and the disciples last saw him in that locked upper room – John tells us, **“None of the disciples dared ask him, ‘Who are you?’ They knew it was the Lord.”** – so, something in Jesus' physical appearance may have changed on that post-Easter dawn on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. But it was more than just his physical appearance that had changed after Easter; so too the nature of his relationship with his followers, both those disciples and us. Shortly after this Jesus would ascend into heaven and he would not be around in the same way he had been before Easter. Those disciples wouldn't hear him preach, or teach. This was the last miracle (that we know of) they would see him perform. The time they had left to bask in the physical presence of Jesus was running short that morning. And neither do we get to enjoy those pleasures.

In physical appearance and the nature of his relationship Jesus has changed since that first Easter and yet, at the same time the Jesus we see in John 21 seems remarkably familiar, remarkably unchanged, doesn't he?

The same Jesus who had demonstrated his complete control over this world with the first miraculous catch of fish – a demonstration that drove Peter to his knees three years earlier – proves today that he still has complete control over this world in that net full of 153 flopping fish.

The same Jesus who had spent three years training and grooming those early disciples would spend yet another morning with them, making clear that he had no intentions of abandoning them.

And most importantly, the same Jesus who had died for the impetuous failures of Peter and those other disciples was still offering them forgiveness. Their sinful hearts hadn't stopped sinning after Easter. And his death on the cross didn't stop paying for those sins after Easter.

Do you remember Paul (formerly known as Saul)? We read about his conversion in the first reading today from Acts. On Easter Sunday I stood up here and I preached to you about how seeing the risen Lord Jesus had changed everything for Paul – how he had gone from a Jewish Pharisee, persecuting Christians, to a fearless Christian missionary all because what he saw on that road on the way to Damascus had changed everything for him.

And yet when Paul looked at his own life and his own heart years after this encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, in some ways, what he saw looked remarkably similar to the man he was before his conversion.

“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing... So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”

Paul looked at his life and realize the even though much about him had changed after he saw his risen Lord, on a deep and fundamental level, he was still the same sinner. And so he is driven to ask that question: Who will rescue me from this body of death? The answer to that all important question that Paul, Peter, you and I must ask ourselves when we see the stubborn sin of our seemingly changeless hearts: **“Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!”**

Easter – the more things change, the more they stay the same – it's a uncomfortable and unfortunately reality when it comes to us and our lives, how we are performing and reforming after Easter, but when it comes to Jesus, there is nothing more comforting than the simple truth that Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. He died, and through his death we are set free from the burden of having to change and reform ourselves. He is risen, and because he lives, we also will live. He is king, and with him in charge we still have nothing to fear.

Easter – the beautiful truth that the more things change, the more our Jesus stays the same.

Amen.