

Walking on Water

3rd Sunday of Easter 5 May 2019

Some read murder mysteries to escape the ordinary of their world. Some watch movies. I don't know what I was trying to do watching this action adventure movie on a "Netflix" type of channel. Probably just bored. It was an Israeli film about their intelligence service trying to catch up with a long sought after, high ranking Nazi official.

In the course of the movie an Israeli agent in cover as a "tour guide" escorts a young German - the grandson of the high Nazi official - around Israel. The young man wants to visit the standard "places to see" in modern Israel. One of them is the Sea of Galilee. There he wades into the water as sort of a parody of the "Walking on Water" of Someone who did in fact walk on water some two thousand years or so earlier. The young man returns to the beach and in the next frame we see both the young man and his "tour guide." In the background there is a grey stone, church looking building. I yell out to no one in particular, "I've been there!"

And I have – as part of a Methodist tour group some twelve years ago.

And He had been there earlier as well.

Probably many times.

On one particular morning He watched His friends out fishing. They were not having much luck. He smiled as He thought about the times He had been here with them before. Maybe He chuckled as He thought about the time the storm came up while they all were in the boat. They were so worried – so scared. "They will have storms greater than any of these we have on the Galilee in the years to come," He thought to Himself.

"Have you caught any fish?" He asks as He laughs to Himself. He knew they had caught none. "And they don't think I have a sense of humor," as He chuckles quietly to Himself. "Cast your net to the right and you'll catch some."

They do and the next few minutes are a mad scramble as they try to get all of them into the net without breaking it. Then one of them looks back to the shore and he sees that the One who has given them the good advice is none other than Jesus. "It is the Lord!" he yells out in happy joy. Peter quickly

grabs something hastily, puts it on, and jumps into the water, swimming to shore. The others bring the boat to shore, jumping out to pull it onto the beach. And in all the commotion someone even counts the fish, 153, if you can believe it! The Romans were insistent on collecting taxes and even monitored the number of fish caught so as to calculate the tax. Matthew would have seen that they counted the fish.

A charcoal fire burns on the rocky outcropping at the edge of the beach. We can smell the fish cooking and bread. “Come and have breakfast!” Jesus invites us to the cook-out. Jesus then breaks the bread and distributes it to us as He does the fish.

The meal over Jesus gets up to talk to us. He has something He wants to say.

Pat Loomis got me into all this. As some of you are aware, she and I live across the road from each other in scenic North Pulaski County and are good friends. She learned of a Methodist tour group forming up to go on a tour to the Holy Land, to Israel. She got me interested in it so I signed up for it – I turned out to be the only Episcopalian as she decided not to go.

After a long flight we landed in Tel Aviv. It was getting dark. We boarded our bus for a hotel overlooking the Sea of Galilee. Maybe three months or so earlier I had helped in a Kairos walk or retreat. This is a prison ministry and part of my helping had been to present a talk. These talks are pre-prepared and usually include a Scripture reading. As it had happened the Scripture reading in the talk I was assigned was our Gospel reading for today.

You got to watch out reading or listening to stuff – even stuff you are reading and speaking for someone else’s benefit. We were reading – we were talking to some inmates at Tucker Prison – yet as I was talking, as I was reading – I was hearing the words – I felt He was talking to me: “Feed my Lambs,” He said. “Tend my sheep.” Finally, “Feed my sheep.”

I didn’t have a detailed itinerary of our trip – I knew generally we would be visiting the Sea of Galilee, Nazareth, Bethlehem, Jerusalem – and we visited them all. I hoped that while at the Sea of Galilee we would visit the place on the shore where He spoke those words. The next day we visited several places around the Sea of Galilee. Late in the afternoon we finally visited the place.

We live in cynical times. How do we know this is the place? It is not far from Capernaum and we know Jesus was there because the walls and foundation of the Synagogue in which He spoke are still there . The small grey, church looking building I saw in the background in the movie – that is the same building I visited on that first day in Israel. It was built over the rocky outcropping – and its walls rest on the remains of the foundation of a small pilgrim church built there around 300 A.D. Nearby fresh water flows into the sea – and has done so for at least a couple of millennia so this area of Sea has been popular for good fishing and has been so all this time. The rocky outcropping has been there all this time and has been a popular place for a cook-out’s until the pilgrim church was built on this site.

So Jesus chose this place, this very place, to make this one of his last resurrection appearances.

There is a day coming for us, each one of us, on which we will say goodbye to all that we have known and all we have loved in this life. We know that as people of faith that we go not into some black abyss of nothingness but rather to the place God has prepared for us. Even so there is sorrow at parting, at leaving. So far as health or situation would permit we, too, would like to say goodbye to the place that has been our home, to the people we love and who love us, and who have brought joy to our lives.

So, too, it was for Christ.

So he chose this place He had come to love to be with His friends. And to speak one final word, one final charge, to these who were His friends and disciples.

So where do we go from here?

This Holy Week, this Easter season has been a special and blessed time for us. Imperfectly perhaps, as I am imperfect, it has been a time of reconciliation and healing for me. I pray it has been so for you as well.

We cannot even begin to understand, much less appreciate the trauma, the emotional and spiritual up’s and down’s, His disciples had gone through. Going from the highs and joys of Jesus’ joyful entry into Jerusalem, then the brazenness and unfairness of His “trial,” the brutality and cruelty of His execution, their fear for their own lives, and then the great joy of His returning from Death...

We can understand why they would try to return to the ordinariness and routine of their lives before they had encountered Him. But it just wasn't the same – and they weren't even catching any fish.

So where do we go from here?

There is a time for prayer, reflection – locking ourselves in our own room, so to speak, to study, to examine our own conscience, our own heart – to look inward. And that has been our own Season of Lent.

But now is the time to go, to share, to build up, to tell the Good news, to reach out to others in love – His love – to invite, to take His love out into the world.

Now is the time to listen to our Master.

Now is the time for us to Feed His lambs, To Tend His sheep, To Feed His sheep.

Amen.

Richard Robertson