

Salmon, Faith and Resilience

- 1 What do fish have to do with faith? A lot!
 - a fish show up frequently in the Bible
 - b you don't have to get very far; first animate life shows up early in Genesis, and it's fish! (slide of teaming fish w/ quote). In the first chapter of Genesis we read that God said "Let the water team with living creatures"
- 2 There are many other occurrences of fishiness throughout the bible, and we'll touch on some of those stories and images,
- 3 but I also want to ask, what can fish teach us?
 - a One thing I think fish show us – and in this way they're like many other creatures we share earth with – they show us the meaning of community and dependence; that we're in this together
- 4 Fish was a primary source of protein for the people who lived in the fishing villages along the Sea of Galilee and Mediterranean coastline. Fish were a source of sustenance – feeding bodies, but in at least one story, fish helped keep people around to hear an important teaching. It's hard to listen when you have a growling belly. (smelling cinnamon rolls)
So fish are not just a source of sustenance, but I think they are in some way a spiritual food, too
- 5 Fish didn't only feed families, in one story a fish helped meet the temple tax burden
 - a story of coin in fishes mouth;
 - b This is an interesting story on several fronts:
 - c what tools did peter have at hand? who knew what kind of job Peter had before he dropped out of productive society and because a follower of Jesus?
 - d he knew how to catch fish, so that's what Jesus sent him to do when there was a need. Jesus didn't ask him to build a wooden box, and look inside that box for a coin. He didn't ask Peter to sew a shirt, and look in the pocket for a coin. Peter wasn't a carpenter, and he wasn't a tailor. He was a fisherman, and Jesus had him use the skills he had.
 - e The coin Peter found was a figurative and real symbol of the empire's power. The image on this coin was essentially a god, and people of that day were willing to do terrible things to obtain its power.
 - f Things are not much different today – think of the things we are willing to do for money – the compromises, the delay of the good, we're willing to sacrifice many other good things for this.
 - g but in this story, all that power was contained in the mouth of a humble fish
lots of great possibilities with this; fish are hard to catch, they can be amazingly elusive. Yet this fish came willingly, surrendering the treasure, but it didn't have to. The might of Ceasar's armies couldn't have captured that fish if it didn't want to be captured. Force would not have worked. Yet it came willingly to Peter.
- 6 Fishing was a communal effort; required teamwork, everyone had to help pull weight (sounds like camp!)

- 7 Fishing was seasonal; if you fished, you had to trade at other times, you had to maintain relationships with others who supplied other needs at other times of the year
 - a the cycle was catch, dry, and trade
- 8 This was also was the cycle for Pacific salmon communities here. Here on this Pacific coast of NAm, at the time that Jesus was feeding the 5000, the native tribes here had been catching, drying, and sharing salmon for thousands of years.
 - a salmon were, and are in a few remaining places are; a way of life, based on need for faithful supply of food entering the rivers every fall, but also a part of a system of generosity
- 9 This is true for the coastal villages in the Bristol Bay region of SW Alaska. Some of you may have seen the national geographic article on Bristol Bay salmon....
- 10 Salmon also exemplify the meaning of commitment and sacrifice; salmon don't just travel to coastal streams like Drift Creek, or the BBay tributaries; they'll go all the way to interior Idaho (and used to go to Nevada)
- 11 Salmon show us that some things are worth struggling for
 - a I'm sure you all know the amazing journey that salmon go though; the return of salmon from the headwater streams where they were born, to the ocean, and back again
- 12 the salmon connect the mountains and the oceans, just like the fall rains, the winter snows, and the spring thaw that sends it all back rushing to the ocean
- 13 and the people who feel a connection with salmon and their relatives the steelhead, chase them with a crazed passion, putting up with winter weather and discomfort
- 14 they are willing to do this, just for a chance to get a glimpse of wildness in a steelhead's eye
- 15 Fish can remind us of the meaning of wonder
 - i wonder is a way of seeing that finds the beauty in things
 - ii salmon are an invitation to wonder
 - iii Henry David Thoreau called wonder a glimpse into the "infinite extent of our relations"
- 16 eye of a steelhead is a portal into the mystery of life
- 17 Wonder can't help but make us also generous; when we connect with that 'infinite extent', whether it's seeing a salmon leaping a falls or the tiny fist of a newborn baby, or the whirl of a pool in the forest, the gratitude that swells in our hearts opens us to the other
- 18 This, I think, is what Jesus was referring to when he said to love one another as I have loved you; to share in the generosity of community
- 19 So here, in this place, DCCamp, one aspect of that sharing is the sharing that we do when we provide the place, the witness, and the nurturing of our programs
- 20 d
- 21 d
- 22 Fish are also a symbol of the resurrection; symbol of Lord's supper and resurrection
- 23 Resurrection fishing story
 - 21¹⁻³ After this, Jesus appeared again to the disciples, this time at the Tiberias Sea (the Sea of Galilee). This is how he did it: Simon Peter, Thomas (nicknamed "Twin"), Nathanael from

Cana in Galilee, the brothers Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. Simon Peter announced, "I'm going fishing."

³⁻⁴ The rest of them replied, "We're going with you." They went out and got in the boat. They caught nothing that night. When the sun came up, Jesus was standing on the beach, but they didn't recognize him.

⁵ Jesus spoke to them: "Good morning! Did you catch anything for breakfast?" They answered, "No."

⁶ He said, "Throw the net off the right side of the boat and see what happens." They did what he said. All of a sudden there were so many fish in it, they weren't strong enough to pull it in.

⁷⁻⁹ Then the disciple Jesus loved said to Peter, "It's the Master!"

When Simon Peter realized that it was the Master, he threw on some clothes, for he was stripped for work, and dove into the sea. The other disciples came in by boat for they weren't far from land, a hundred yards or so, pulling along the net full of fish. When they got out of the boat, they saw a fire laid, with fish and bread cooking on it.

¹⁰⁻¹¹ Jesus said, "Bring some of the fish you've just caught." Simon Peter joined them and pulled the net to shore—153 big fish! And even with all those fish, the net didn't rip.

¹² Jesus said, "Breakfast is ready." Not one of the disciples dared ask, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Master.

¹³⁻¹⁴ Jesus then took the bread and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus had shown himself alive to the disciples since being raised from the dead.

a

b I love that they count the fish (read Duncan) when the resurrected Christ appears on the morning shore of the Sea of Galilee and directs his forlorn and skunked disciples to the famous catch of *John 21*, we learn that the net contained not a "boatload" of fish, nor "about a hundred and a half, nor "over a gross," but precisely "an hundred and fifty and three." This is, it seems to me, one of the most remarkable statistics ever computed. Consider the circumstances: this is *after* the Crucifixion and the Resurrection; Jesus is standing on the beach newly risen from the dead, and it is only the third time the disciples have seen him since the nightmare of Calvary. And yet we learn that in the net there were "great fishes" numbering precisely "an hundred and fifty and three." How was this digit discovered? Mustn't it have happened thus? upon hauling the net to shore, the disciples squatted down by that immense, writhing fish pile and started tossing them into a second pile, painstakingly counting, "one, two, three, four, five, six, seven..." all the way up to an hundred and fifty and three, while the newly risen Lord of Creation, the Sustainer of their beings, He who died for them and for Whom they would gladly die, stood waiting, ignored, till the heap of fish was quantified."

c

24 salmon, perhaps more than any other creature, illustrate so beautifully that death is not the end. Salmon die after they spawn. As they enter freshwater, they commit all of their energy to growing the eggs and milt, and making it upriver to the spawning ground. So much so that there

is little left to spare at the end of the journey, and they can no longer support their own immune systems, and they begin to deteriorate.

- 25 But this death is a gift to the life around them in the nursery streams; caddis flies
- 26 baby salmon
- 27 birds
- 28 mammals like this wily arctic fox
- 29 seals
- 30 brown bears
- 31 even the vegetation carries the gift of salmon life blood. biochemists can trace isotopes that came in from the ocean in the bodies of salmon, and detect them in the vegetation growing along salmon streams – the gift of salmon extends that far.
- 32 this tree probably took root along DCC hundreds of years ago; you don't have to go back too many generations in these trees to be back to time of Jesus
 - a There are echoes of the salmon runs that sustained the native villages along Drift Creek in this cedar tree today; molecules that bare the signature of C and N that were brought in from the ocean in the bodies of salmon, lived and died here, giving life to multiple generations of people, animals, birds, and plants
- 33 so we, here today, are part of a long line of generosity that has grown, been fostered and sustained in this river canyon, from the salmon, to the native villages before us, the cedars, the bears, the eagles, the thimbleberries, the ancient fungi – we're part of a long chain. The sharing we do today is different in many ways from the sharing that was done in this ecosystem for thousands of years before our arrival, but in many ways it's the same.
 - a We work together,
 - b we provide for the next generation with our generosity and nurturing.
 - c We experience wonder and help each other see the beauty that's sometimes not obvious.
 - d We use the gifts we're given.
 - e We help each other resist the temptations of power.
 - f We know that death is not the worst that can happen, and it's not the end.
 - g We know that resurrection happens.
- 34 salmon can also teach us something about resilience
 - a in many places, salmon have been reduced to a shadow of their former abundance; in others they've been completely eliminated.
 - i Europe, E NA, California, PNW, AK
 - b but they are also amazingly persistent
 - i redundancy
 - ii resistance
 - iii repair
- 35 DCC, salmon, and resilience

"Like gamblers, baseball fans and television net works, fishermen are enamored of statistics. The adoration of statistics is a trait so deeply embedded in their nature that even those rarefied anglers the disciples of Jesus couldn't resist backing their yarns with arithmetic: when the resurrected Christ appears on the morning shore of the Sea of Galilee and directs his forlorn and skunked disciples to the famous catch of *John 21*, we learn that the net contained not a "boatload" of fish, nor "about a hundred and a half, nor "over a gross," but precisely "an hundred and fifty and three." This is, it seems to me, one of the most remarkable statistics ever computed. Consider the circumstances: this is *after* the Crucifixion and the Resurrection; Jesus is standing on the beach newly risen from the dead, and it is only the third time the disciples have seen him since the nightmare of Calvary. And yet we learn that in the net there were "great fishes" numbering precisely "an hundred and fifty and three." How was this digit discovered? Mustn't it have happened thus? upon hauling the net to shore, the disciples squatted down by that immense, writhing fish pile and started tossing them into a second pile, painstakingly counting, "one, two, three, four, five, six, seven..." all the way up to an hundred and fifty and three, while the newly risen Lord of Creation, the Sustainer of their beings, He who died for them and for Whom they would gladly die, stood waiting, ignored, till the heap of fish was quantified." 14-15

But then Duncan says, on page 16:

"Concerning those disciples huddled over the pile of fish, another possibility occurs to me: perhaps they paid the fish no heed. Perhaps they stood in a circle adoring their Lord while He, the All-Curious Son of His All-Knowing Dad, counted them all Himself."