

April 10, 2016
The Third Sunday of Easter
The Rev. Nancy Wakely

When I was in the second grade, my cousin Steve and I did the unthinkable. We broke one of my mother's canning jars. Truth known, I broke it and Steve watched me do it. They were stacked in a bushel basket on the screened in back porch and I don't remember exactly how it got broken. What I knew in that moment was that somehow, somehow, I was going to be in big trouble. Canning jars were dear when I was a kid and most people couldn't afford to just waltz down to the hardware store and buy a case of them. They were passed down through the generations like fine jewelry.

To make a long story even longer, Steve was a sneaky kid and he decided I should hide the broken glass in the tall grass under a tree. Then, we went on about the business of playing cowboys and Indians with the neighborhood kids. Being the one who looked most Native American, I got to climb a tree, let out a blood curdling scream, and leap down at the others who were playing the part of unsuspecting settlers. The problem on that occasion was that it was the same tree with the tall grass that was hiding the large shards of glass....which I landed on with my bare feet. My friend Charlotte dragged me to the back porch and got my mom. When mom asked what happened I screamed, "It was a thousand bumble bees, Mama! They were in the grass and I landed on them!" Notice it wasn't just one bumble bee or even twenty. It was a "thousand bumble bees". I wanted to make sure it sounded big so I added a lot more detail that I won't get in to this morning. It was important that my mom be able to visualize this momentous event. Charlotte's mother, Junie, heard the screaming and ran over from their house next door. I raised my foot to really bring home the point and blood squirted everywhere. Charlotte fainted and June kept screaming, "Lord, God neighbor! She's going to bleed to death right here in front of us!" Mom wrapped my foot in a towel and off we went to the doctor.

About the only doc in town then was Doctor Buffington. He analyzed the injury and allowed as how bumble bees did not do the damage. There were several people in my life that I absolutely could not lie to or let down: my parents (except to save my hide), my grandparents, the preacher, Miss Pat my Sunday school teacher, and Dr. Buffington. I confessed, all was forgiven, my hide was not tanned, and eight stitches later, I lived to see another day.

It's probably a long stretch for you to see how I got from the gospel reading today to the bumblebee story. But for me, it was just a short leap from “a thousand bumblebees” to the story of the disciples of Jesus catching not 20, not 50, but exactly “153 fish” in their net. Now that's a lot of fish. There we a lot of details in this story—cast your net to the right side of the boat, Peter was naked and had to put on his clothes, Jesus fed them breakfast, not lunch or dinner. I think the writer of John was not trying to tell a whopper, but rather convey that something big was going on and the details made the story more important.

This isn't the only story about the disciples or others seeing Jesus after his death but in this story, the disciples were back at what they were doing before Jesus died. Jesus said something really big in this story and it was his point all along. Whether the disciples actually saw Jesus or just finally opened their eyes and saw what he had been talking about all along—either way—the bottom line is important.

Jesus was making a point in this story. He said to Simon Peter, “Do you love me?” Peter said that he did and Jesus said, “Feed my lambs”. He asked again and upon hearing Peter say, “Yes” he said, “Tend my sheep”. The last thing Jesus said was, “Follow me”. If I could boil down the New Testament in a way that would ultimately speak to my heart, there would only be the following lines:

Love God and your neighbor.

Feed my lambs.

Tend my sheep.

Follow me.

I don't have to worry about whether people choose to believe in a literal resurrection or not. I just have to think about those four lines and wonder if in the end, Jesus is resurrected in my life, and in my heart, and in what I say and do. That's big to me and in truth, it is the biggest challenge I face every day—seeing the face of Jesus in the face of my neighbor and then tending to them. It is difficult for us to not just stand quietly by sometimes and shake our heads when injustice rears its ugly head rather than keeping in mind the vision of a nail-scarred hand reaching out and saying, “Follow me” and what that should look like in our lives.

It is not enough to remain silent in the face of the injustices that Jesus talked about and that we see around us every day. When we remain silent, what we say is that we haven't gotten the point of what it means to be Easter people. We can't remain silent and stay neutral rather than speak truth to power and act when injustice occurs to one neighbor or to thousands of our neighbors. We have to get down to the nitty gritty.

I was reminded this week of the words of Desmond Tutu. He said, “If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor”. No act of kindness or gentle word is too small. The small, everyday acts of tending to others and of feeding them by our treatment of them is big to those on the receiving end. It is in the small details of how we live our lives that Jesus lives on and that we tell his story. It is the least we can do in light of the story of a man who loved so deeply in life that he died rather than turn his back on the oppressed and on truths that are eternal.

When we see with the eyes of Jesus, when our hearts are on fire for those who touched the heart of Jesus, it should sting more fiercely than a thousand bumblebees and it should weigh on us more heavily than 153 fish. It's all in the little things that we do in our lives that convey a bigger story and a larger truth. Don't hold back. You never know what you're going to do or say that will make the story of the life and the love of Jesus live on in the world. It's all in the details.