

Annual Meeting 2018 (January 28)

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

John 21:1-14

Why are we here?

Not just at the annual meeting of the parish,
But here, in this church,
Sunday by Sunday?

Of all the many ways there might be
To answer the question,
One way might be this:

We are here because this gospel story
Is our story.
This story of empty nets filled to overflowing
Is our story.

We are here because the living Christ
Is present and active in our midst,
In this gathered community,
Transforming us and giving us hope.

We are here because the living Christ,
Hidden yet known,
Calls us to turn from dead ends
To new journeys,
From empty coffers
To uncounted abundance,
From fruitless searches
To joyful discovery.

We are here because
In the presence of the living Christ
We see what is always here,
The unquenchable goodness of all that is,
Our limitless potential
To chose the good,
Our capacity to embrace
Healing, renewal, and reconciliation.

The disciples were hopeless
After the death of Jesus.
They saw no possibility

Other than returning to their old ways.
But the old ways were gone.
There were no fish to be caught by doing the same old thing.

So they ended up with nothing.

Until Jesus came and called to them.
Until they looked up,
Saw their friend
In the face of a stranger,
And listened to his voice.

There was no magic on the other side of the boat.
It was only that they tried again,
The same thing in a new way,
In the presence of the one who makes all things new.

It was the presence of the living Christ
That turned emptiness into fullness,
Scarcity into abundance.
Empty nets into a bountiful catch.

This is our story too.
This church was built here for a reason,
And we are still here.

The presence of the living Christ
Sustains and enlivens us
Every time we gather,
And while we are apart.

When we break the bread
And share the cup,
He is here,
As surely as he was with his first friends
In the upper room.

You know this is true.
Whether you say it in these words or not,
You know that there is a spirit here
That comes from beyond us,
And yet comes through us.
That's why we are here.

We are here because this is a place of life.
We are here because this is a place of abundance.

We are here because even though the numbers say
That we have challenges that could be overwhelming,
We will find a way,
As the people in this place have always found a way.

The disciples had empty nets
As the day dawned after a long night.
Anyone who stood on the shore
Would have pitied them.
Anyone who stood on the shore
Would have asked them what they would try next.
Anyone on the shore would have said
They were empty handed and out of ideas.

But the one who stood on the shore
Was not just anyone.
The one on the shore
Was the holy one,
The one who calls us back into hope,
Back into courage,
Back into life.

Some churches are dwindling.
Some churches are dying.
Some churches are fighting a valiant fight.
God is present in all of them,
Loving them,
Offering everything there is to offer,
As they go on their way.

I believe we are a different kind of church.
God loves us no more, and no less.
But God is present here
In a different way.
God is here to invite us
To keep at it.
If we can see the living Christ
Standing on the shore,
If we can hear his voice,
Then I believe God is working something new within us,
As in the disciples
Whose nets were filled to overflowing.

God is here;
The living Christ is among us.
The Holy Spirit is working through us.

Can we see it, hear it,
Attend to the call?
That's why we're here.