

BROKEN, MENDED, STRONGER
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Fish, fishing, no fish that night. A voice, “You have no fish have you?” No is the answer. “Cast your net on the right side,” Abundance. More fish than can be believed. Recognition.

A meal, bread broken and given. Fish abundant and shared by the sea. Belief

A charcoal fire, three questions, three chances.

As Yogi Bera once said, “It’s déjà vu all over again.”

These are familiar images, some new to John entirely, but present in the other Gospels. They all come together in chapter 21 and create this feeling of we have been here before. This quick synopsis of all these familiar images read like a condensed version of gospel stories. Why does this recapitulation show up now in John’s gospel?

Broken and defeated despite two resurrection appearances, the disciples have retreated to Galilee where it all began. Rowan Williams comments about this story in terms of the disciples going back to the past to recover their future because they looked at the events with new eyes.

They return to their nets with the same result they had the first time they encountered Jesus. Empty nets and despair. It almost seems as if they are going through the motions of life, in shock. Then comes the command to cast their nets on the right side. Again Jesus points them to abundance and in that abundance, they recognize him. They don’t dare ask who he is on the beach for they know in his feeding of them who he is. They not only don’t dare ask, they don’t need to ask.

They experience the familiar, but in a new light, through a new lens if you will. This is the lens of the resurrected Christ. In their ordinary world they finally begin to understand the power of these extraordinary events of the resurrection

Sitting in the chapel at Virginia Seminary on Friday of Easter week many years ago I heard this passage read and then The Rev. McNaughton-Ayers preached about it. I was playing my baritone, Wendy was playing trumpet and we were seated as usual over by the piano. Now I had been in the chapel hundreds of times. Attended hundreds of services there and sat in the spot next to the piano I don’t know how many times, but this was different. It was a chapel service like many others except that on that day, the lights went out during the service.



With the lights out, sitting in the dark, with the sun streaming in through the window directly across in the south transept over by the sacristy door, I noticed something I had never seen before. The window is on the cover of your service bulletin. Take a moment to look at it. The center of the window has the three circles of the trinity in it and that wonderful multi colored glass circle in the very center. Just as the preacher mentioned cast your net on the right side of the boat, I saw them. The fish in the window! There are four fish in that huge window. If the window were a clock, they are at noon, 3, 6 and 9, all around and coming from the trinity portion in all directions. They start as a triangular tail and then an oblong body almost exactly like the ancient fish symbol of the church. Like you see on people's cars. I finally saw them for the first time that morning. Seeing them this way was much like what Barbara Brown Taylor described as her favorite pastime of doing the hidden picture puzzle.

The first one that I noticed was the one at the 3 o'clock position, the one on the right side. I think I noticed that one first possibly because I looked to the right when Marge said cast your net on the right side, but that one fish is slightly different from all the others. There is an extra metal portion running through the triangular tail that makes it look even more like a fish. Out of the eight fish in the two chapel windows only one has a line in the tail. Was that a flaw in the glass? I have worked with stained glass and adding the colors to the glass makes it brittle and difficult to work with, not to mention an expensive material. However, a broken piece often doesn't matter. Many times I have had a piece break as I was cutting it. All you do is use it somewhere else or as in this case, you simply mend it with an extra piece of lead and go on with the work. Flawed, but still part of the window. Flawed, but that flaw was what allowed me to see the other fish.

A mended piece like the one tail can be even stronger than the others. Peter is the broken piece that is mended and becomes the key. I love Peter. He is so totally human. After all who else would put his clothes on to jump into the water. Eating at a charcoal fire, like the fire in the temple courtyard, Peter is asked three times by Jesus, “do you love me?” Just like in the courtyard Peter has three chances to answer Jesus and affirm his love. Poor Peter, his is still so flawed that he doesn’t get it quite right. Jesus asks him, do you truly love me more than these? Jesus uses the Greek word agape, the love of God. Peter answers with philio, Greek for the love of friendship. Jesus still charges him with feeding his lambs. Jesus tries again and changes the question slightly. He asks do you truly love me (agape) and Peter still answers with philio. The last time Jesus uses philio the love of friendship and Peter is disappointed for just like with the cock crowing the third time, he realizes what he has done. Yet, Jesus still charges him with feeding his sheep. And then the truly miraculous occurs. Flaws and all Jesus accepts what Peter has to offer and foretells the death by which Peter will glorify the lord. And calls him to follow and become one of the great disciples, flaws and all.

My discoveries of that day in chapel were all because of things that didn’t go right. The fuse in the transformer blew to create the black out. My mind was wandering instead of listening to the sermon closely. Some glass artist made a mistake or somehow that one piece of glass was cracked and repaired in a way that allowed me to see in a new way.

Flaws and mistakes; breaking and mending. The cross is the great breaking; the resurrection is the great mending so that we may see the risen Lord. We come week after week to St. Aidan’s and to this table. We see what we have seen before, hear what we have heard before and like Peter, we don’t always, no in fact we rarely get it right and yet; Jesus accepts all that we have to offer.

Broken, we confess and are forgiven. Forgiven we come to the rail and are fed and healed. Healed, mended and stronger then before, flaws and all we are sent out into the world and told to go forth to love and serve the lord. Alleluia, Alleluia.