

As an only child, I grew up in church sitting between my mother and my grandmother. I was pretty well behaved only because I had no other options. But I made up for it one Sunday when I was in my mid-twenties—old enough to know better—and visiting a church with two friends from camp. It was probably Easter season because the sermon was about resurrection, and the pastor was saying something to the effect that we look forward to eternal life not just as ghosts or spirits but with whole, resurrected bodies. And I whispered to my friends, *I hope my heavenly body has a tail*. And their reactions were not silent. I was joking, but twenty years and a seminary degree later, I still can't tell you whether we should expect our resurrected bodies to be young, old, athletic, attractive...whether you'll get back your appendix or wisdom teeth or not since you don't really need them anyway. The very little scripture says about bodily resurrection, which is really just about Jesus' resurrected body, poses more questions than answers. The risen Jesus appears inside rooms without opening doors; he still bears the wounds of the crucifixion, but they don't seem to be painful or debilitating. Nobody recognizes Jesus' resurrected body at first: Mary thinks he's the gardener; the travelers walk miles to Emmaus talking *about* him without realizing they're talking *to* him; the disciples see Jesus on the shore and hear him speak but don't realize it's him until their nets fill up with fish. This confusion about Jesus' resurrected body mirrors the disciples' confusion about resurrection life itself.

After Jesus is crucified his followers spend a number of days in Jerusalem, hiding out from the authorities so they aren't unjustly arrested and executed like Jesus was. Eventually at least some of them make it back to Galilee where they lived before they started following Jesus. Peter announces that he's going fishing—a return to his pre-discipleship vocation; the other fisherman-disciples go with him, but they catch nothing, perhaps an object lesson teaching us that we can't just go back to business as usual after the transformational experience of knowing Jesus. From the beach, still unrecognizable to the disciples, Jesus instructs them to cast their nets to the right side of the boat...and then things get weird.

The disciples catch so many fish they can't haul in the nets—a total of 153 fish, a number which probably means something but we don't know what. Peter is fishing naked, a detail that reminds us not everything in the Bible is a good example for us to follow. Peter then puts *on* clothes so he can jump *into* the water, like Forest Gump on board the *Jenny* when he first sees Lieutenant Dan on the dock. The other disciples bring in the boat and the fish, and everyone has breakfast with Jesus, whom they now recognize because of the miraculous catch of fish.

Remembering the beginning of John's gospel, Jesus' first sign was turning water into a state store worth of really good wine—a decadent demonstration of God's abundance. Here at the end of John's gospel, Jesus' last recorded sign, directing the disciples to this massive catch of fish, again shows God's abundant provision. But we see even more of God's abundance in the conversation between Jesus and Peter over the charcoal fire where Jesus has cooked their breakfast. The last charcoal fire we read about in John's gospel was in the courtyard outside the high priest's house where Peter denied Jesus three times. Here, Jesus gives Peter three opportunities to reverse that denial, asking him, *Simon, son of John, do you love me?* No longer denying it, Peter says, *Yes, Lord, you know that I love you...* And Jesus would have known that, although we can see why he leads Peter to affirm that relationship once for each time Peter had denied it. Jesus forgives and restores Peter as many times as Peter turned away from him.

The miraculous catch of fish shows us how abundantly God provides, and Jesus' three-fold restoration of Peter shows us the incredible depths of God's grace and mercy. But Jesus' instructions to Peter also show us the magnitude of the task to which we are called as disciples. Loving Jesus means serving Jesus, and serving Jesus means serving others as Jesus served us. *Feed my lambs...Tend my sheep...Feed my sheep.* It looked like Peter's plan was to go back to his life as a fisherman, but Jesus, who previously referred to himself as the *Good Shepherd*, now entrusts Peter with the metaphorical work of shepherding, not fishing. And tending sheep for Jesus is a task that requires sacrifice; Jesus even warns Peter what this commitment will cost him—that his life will no longer be his own to do with what he wishes, but will be spent in the service of others, some of whom, like those who unjustly condemned Jesus, will return violence for Peter's faithful acts of love. Jesus makes sure Peter knows what the resurrected life will cost him, and still invites him, *Follow me.*

God who so generously provides for us and so graciously forgives us invites us into a life of generosity, mercy, and loving service toward others. It is a fitting coincidence that we read about that call to selfless service on Scout Sunday, because the Scouts' oath includes the promise: *to help other people at all times...Not to help other people when it's convenient or to help other people so long as it doesn't cost me anything...* and following Jesus, who loved and served others in obedience to God's command, even at the expense of his own life, calls us to that same sacrificial service. If we all were to help other people at all times, we'd be doing just what Jesus asks: *If you love me, then follow me by tending my sheep.* May God give us the desire, strength, and compassion to live the resurrection life to which we have been called.