

Scripture: John 21:1-17

Sermon Title: “**Not** Back to Normal”

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Take a minute and think about some of the life-changing, awe-inspiring, truly wonderful moments that you have experienced. Identify some of those experiences which have taken you away from your normal, everyday life, and either literally or physically, have taken you to new places, to new endeavors, even to new areas of emotion within yourself and brought about great joy. They may have lasted for years, months, weeks, days, hours, or even just minutes, but no matter how long one of these transcendent experiences lasted, you always have remembered them for they were powerful and joy-filled. And in the moment, you may even wish they didn't have to come to an end – we have talked about that before – that sometimes we just want to hold onto moments like this. Still, eventually, as do all moments of life, these wonderful experiences do come to an end and we find ourselves back in the ordinary – some might even say back to normal, back to our usual lives. It's in those days after these wonderful, transforming experiences, where I want to focus us today. What do the days after such a phenomenal experience, such life-changing moments – what do those next days look like for you?

Right away, I find myself thinking back to high school and the mission trips I enjoyed going on with my home church. For a week at a time, we would leave our “normal lives” behind, we would travel to new places. We would get to work on houses and in communities which were devastated by natural disasters and, through it, we would help change lives. It was also a wonderful time because I got to know members of my church family even better as we lived, worked, ate, and prayed together. Then, after the week was up, we would return home, often arriving late at night, and I would go home to my usual bed and fall asleep. It was the next morning which was the hardest. After every trip, when I would wake up the next morning, back to my “normal life”, I would feel rather blue, rather sad. I remember my mom noted that for a few days after

returning from any of these trips, she could tell that I was feeling down and that I wanted to go back. Now it wasn't because I didn't want to be home with my family and friends – of course it was great to see everyone again! But it just was hard to be back and embrace my every day “normal” life again.

And this is not a unique response, in fact, I would say it is rather common. When I first got to volunteer at Pilgrim Lodge, the Maine Conference Church Camp, in the summer of 2017, the counseling staff for Camp Pride, of which I was one, were prepped to have conversations with our campers near the end of our week about the “post camp blues”. This is something that many of our campers would experience – heck, many of our counselors would experience. We wanted to prepare our campers for that and encourage connection and friendships formed at camp to find their way into their “normal” lives to make the transition back a bit smoother, because, when we have experienced something truly amazing, there is no doubt that it can be hard to say goodbye to such wonderful moments. These blues come when we wish we could be back in those moments once again.

As we journey through Eastertide, this season where we continue to celebrate the glories of the resurrection, I often see us as spending time with the early disciples and followers of Jesus in those days after. They have experienced something truly amazing, having walked with Jesus for several years, having been taught by Jesus, having served with and been served by him, and now having experienced the empty tomb and the Risen Christ. Wow! But what do the days afterwards look like? Did they have any “post Easter blues” as their lives continued? I mean, of course there is great joy in the resurrection, but still in these days after there is some doubt, some worry, some fear, and there has to be some question of what happens next. Wouldn't it just be great if they could just go back to the days with Jesus teaching and serving or even to just bask in the glow of an empty tomb and in the Risen Christ?

In our scriptures, we get a couple glimpses into this reality of the days after such a life-changing experience with Jesus, including from our reading shared this morning. On

this particular day, as we find Simon Peter and six other disciples together, they seem to return to life as normal. They go back to what was the trade of many of them before Jesus called them into discipleship, and they go fishing – it would seem they go back to their normal lives. We are not told what exactly they are feeling, but perhaps their empty nets that night echo a sense of emptiness they are feeling in these days. Perhaps a longing to go back or even just a longing to see the Risen Christ again – remember he is just sort of popping up here and there. For even if they truly understand what the resurrection means and believe it to be true, Jesus is still not with them in the same way anymore. Life is different. Yet, as Jesus comes to remind them, life is certainly not back to normal – life for the disciples cannot return to what normal once was.

When Jesus appears the next morning on the shore and leads the disciples into a grand and glorious catch with a net filled with fish, he reminds them that all of what has been experienced, that all they have shared, it should not be let go. There is no returning to the way life was three years ago before Jesus entered their lives. For the experiences that they have shared, these are meant to transform them and to change their normal in wonderful ways. When he shares breakfast with them on the beach, it feels to me like a reminder that even meals are different now for they communion still with Jesus. And probably the biggest showing that the normal is changing is found in Jesus' conversation with Peter. Remember back to how Peter, before the crucifixion, was the one who denied Jesus three times? Now he professed his love for Jesus three times! That's quite the change. And do you remember how Jesus was referred to as the Good Shepherd and his people are the flock? Now Peter, and in turn all who proclaim a love for Christ, are called to do the work of shepherding. Of feeding the lambs – literally and figuratively feeding and caring for the people of this world! Jesus reminds us today as he reminded the disciples back then, that there is no going back. That there is no returning to "normal", for when your life has been touched by God, often through those life-changing, miraculous moments which we have experienced, it has been blessed into a new way of being.

Beloved People of God, that's the thing about any of the life-changing experiences that take place on our journeys. There really is no such thing as going back to what was our normal – going back to the way life once was. For these moments have changed us. And the “blues” that many often feel after such powerful experiences, they are the transition time between what life was and what life will be, as we adjust our normal to be blessed by the gifts found in the moments we have shared, the wonders we have witnessed. They may change how we interact with others, they may change our attitudes and our outlook on life, and they may change the direction in which we are heading. It may be a big difference or small, but all in all, some new way of being will find its way into our lives. Our new normal will be found, made holy by the glories we have experienced. So may we always be open to how the blessings of Jesus, witnessed in full nets, in awe-inspiring experiences, or in something as simple as broken bread, will change us and lead us deeper into this life. Thanks be to God! Amen.