

"Once, Twice, Three Times" based on John 21:1-19

Delivered on August 29, 2021 by Rev. Dr. Cheni Khonje, Pulpit Supply

The birth of a child is a wonderful gift for the baby's parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles because they will have the privilege of nurturing the precious one to adulthood. The family has many milestones to which they can look forward, such as the beginning of cooing sounds and the first steps that the little one will take. At first, the baby's attempts to walk are plagued with wobbles and falls. Soon the baby begins to master the art of staying upright on those ever-so-unsteady legs, and then watch out! The little one will begin tearing around the home, dragging things off tables and terrorizing the relatives and friends who have not learned the art of child-proofing their home.

Another delightful stage in the young one's life is when they begin to speak and to learn the names of things. One couple in the town of my first call, whom I am privileged to call my friends, allowed me to take their son with me on occasion. Many people commented on how calm and well-behaved this little boy was in my company, even when his parents were not out and about with us. It delighted me to no end that he was talking more and more each day. Much to his mom and dad's chagrin, I love to spoil this cute angel. One evening after supper, I encouraged his parents to go and enjoy a date night while I stayed with the little guy. He and I were going to be splitting a chocolate frosty. I'll have you know that he was quite capable of feeding himself, but he loved it when I did the job for him. As we demolished our terrific treat, I would say to my cute companion after he took a bite, "What do you think? Mm...scrumptious!"

He would laugh in response to my comment. I was soon reminded why one has to take great care in what is said around a 2-year-old. The little one soon began trying to say the same thing back to me, except it came out as, "Cheni, mmm...grumkiss!"

His parents began teaching him who he was by having him repeat his first and last name. Little Max started calling his parents Mommy Kropp and Daddy Kropp. He also gave all of his toys his last name. I found out who Max thought that I was when I walked into their home one day and he called out a greeting saying, "Hi Cheni Kropp!"

Children are fascinating, and we revel in the cute stories about how they learn to say and do things. We also realize that it is an awesome responsibility to raise children to know who they are as they grow up and become adults. Child psychologists, and those who have experienced child-rearing first hand, always advise new parents that it is best not to spoil a child. However, showering them with love is an essential component of their upbringing.

Jesus could not agree more with that wisdom, and it is evident that he felt the same way especially when one examines at this life and ministry. In our Scripture reading this morning, we meet the disciples on a day in which they are trying to get back to their former way of life. They were looking out at the Sea of Tiberias when Simon Peter declared that rather than stand around doing nothing, he was going to go fishing. Thomas, James and John and two others

thought it was a great idea. It had been a while since they had last put their boats out on the water. Fishing had been their livelihood, and it had also been a relaxing pass-time for them as well.

The disciples stayed out all night and yet their effort was unfruitful. At dawn they noticed that someone was walking along the beach. He called out to them saying, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" When they confirmed his assessment of their fishing trip, he said a most curious thing. He told them to cast their nets to the right side of the boat.

Following his instructions, they soon heard loud splashing and thrashing as loads of fish got caught in their net. The catch was so huge that they were unable to haul it in, and that was when the disciple whom Jesus loved recognized who was addressing them from the shore. He immediately told Simon Peter that it was the Lord. Peter's impulse was to put on his clothes and jump into the sea. The others dragged the net full of fish alongside the boat as they returned to the beach. Jesus had started a fire and was already cooking them breakfast. He asked them to bring some of their fish, inviting them to come and eat.

There was no need for introductions and nobody dared to ask who the man was, because they all recognized him. He had indeed been raised from the dead, and this was the third time that Jesus appeared to his disciples. Breakfast was over, but they lingered to talk to Jesus. The Lord asked Simon Peter if he loved him, and the first two times, Simon Peter had answered in the affirmative. In response to that, Jesus had asked him to feed his lambs and tend to his sheep. The third time Jesus had asked if Simon Peter loved him, his disciple was upset because he was sure that Jesus already knew how he felt about being his close friend and follower. Jesus then asked him to feed his sheep.

In mediating on this passage, we begin to see a pattern unfolding as a new lesson is brought to light. The three-fold question to Simon Peter reminds those of us who read the Gospel several centuries later about the three times that Peter had denied knowing Jesus when he was on trial. It is almost as if this form of asking is a ritual to undo what Simon Peter had done three times before the cock crowed on Friday morning.

One of the other things that we glean from the story is that the decision to go fishing is akin to Jesus' sending the disciples to go and spread the Good News. The last time he had appeared to them, he had said that he was sending them in the same way that God had sent Jesus to the world. When he had called them away from their fishing jobs, asking them to leave behind their family business, Jesus had told them that he would make them fish for people. The act of fishing began to take on new meaning for the disciples. Simon Peter had gone to help the other haul in the large catch, and hauling the fish into the boat would become synonymous with drawing people to Christ.

The great number of fish that the disciples caught served as a reminder of the abundant grace that Jesus brings. At the inauguration of his earthly ministry, Jesus had shown that God's

blessings were always given in abundance. The wedding at Cana was the first miracle that Jesus performed. He not only turned water into the best wine that anyone had ever tasted, but he also produced much more than they needed to have for the 7-day wedding feast. We also remember that God's unprecedented abundance was evident in the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 men, a number that did not include the women and children who were also in attendance that day. Two loaves and five sardines were blessed and all those people ate their fill. The leftovers filled 12 baskets full to overflowing. God's generous and abundant love for his people continues even in the Resurrected Jesus.

Siblings in Christ, this message is also a directive for those of us who have our identity in Jesus Christ. We are Christians and we are called to follow Jesus to the places of ministry both within our town and around the world. Absecon's name comes from the Native American Absegami people; the name of this beautiful town is derived from the word Absogami which means "little stream". We know that streams are tributaries to the mighty rivers of our world, and that those powerful waters empty into the vast oceans. The name of this town may mean little stream, and yet big things happen here: a quick examination of the history of this town tells us that Joe Callahan, who was a quarterback that played for the Green Bay Packers, comes from Absecon as does health advocate Amy Kennedy. What is God preparing the people of Absecon Presbyterian Church to contribute in the ministry of Jesus Christ?

Jesus invites us to leap out of the boat and join Christ at the shorelines of other people's lives. The boat has been long-recognized as a symbol for the church. God asks us to step out of our comfort zones and go to do ministry on the Jersey shore; we can volunteer with the Absecon-Galloway Ecumenical Community to help the young people in the area through tutoring, or mentoring them to develop and hone their skills for public speaking and business management.

Jesus invites you and me to tend his sheep. Our mission to care for others through the Prayer Shawl ministry offers comfort to those who are sick and recovering from illness. Wrapping them in the loving efforts of the crafters keeps them warm and secure in the love of God.

Jesus invites us to spread the Good News of the Gospel, even to the point of martyrdom. Are we prepared to die for Christ? It's a scary thought, and yet Bishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador did just that when he was assassinated for preaching the Word of God. However, we can share the Gospel through Wednesday evening Bible study, sharing the Scripture on our church Facebook page and during the third Monday Communion services. Whatever the beloved people of God from this congregation contribute in Christ's name, our time and talents, we know that sharing the love of God with others will make a big difference in their lives. May our ministry continue to bring glory to Christ's Holy Name. *Blessing and honor and glory and power be unto the One who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever. Amen.*

Word Search Puzzle

from WhenWeWordSearch.com (use for free distribution only)
words in a straight line left to right or top to bottom



Words in the puzzle are printed in ***bold italics***.

John 21:1-19 (NRSV) After these things Jesus ***showed*** himself again to the disciples by the ***Sea*** of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. ***Gathered*** there together were ***Simon*** Peter, ***Thomas*** called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in ***Galilee***, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that ***night*** they caught nothing. Just after ***daybreak***, Jesus ***stood*** on the ***beach***; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "***Children***, you have no fish, have you?" They ***answered*** him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net to the right ***side*** of the ***boat***, and you will find some." So they ***cast*** it, and now they were not able to ***haul*** it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus ***loved*** said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and ***jumped*** into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, ***dragging*** the net full of fish, for they were not far from the ***land***, only about a ***hundred*** yards off. When they had gone ***ashore***, they saw a ***charcoal*** fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "***Bring*** some of the fish that you have just ***caught***." So Simon Peter went ***aboard*** and hauled the net ashore, full of ***large*** fish, a hundred ***fifty***-three of them; and though there were so many, the ***net*** was not ***torn***. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples ***dared*** to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the ***bread*** and gave it to them, and did the same with the ***fish***. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the ***disciples*** after he was raised from the dead. When they had finished ***breakfast***, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon ***son*** of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, ***Lord***; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" ***Peter*** felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you ***love*** me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "***Follow*** me."