

Oh Look! Squirrel! 10:45
John 21:1-19

Slide: Luna with a toy

My dog Luna is by far the most distractible animal in the universe. She doesn't just play with one toy. She plays with them all, almost all at the same time actually. The moment I or Jim gets home, Luna runs to her toy box (yes, she has a toy box), pulls out something to play with and starts running around with it. But, if I were to go to her box and pull something else out, well, now that toy is the best to play with, not the one she chose.

And, then, when she is playing alone while Jim and I are either working or watching TV, she will pull one toy from the box, play with it about five minutes, then another from the box and play with that one, etc. etc., until we have all the toys strewn all over the living room and dining room. I just wish she knew how to put them back!

But, then, often while she is playing, she will catch a side glance of a squirrel outside and suddenly run to the window. Forget the toy, now there is a squirrel! Anyone who has dogs knows that the squirrel is the most enticing distraction there is. Even if there isn't a squirrel, all you need do is say the word "squirrel" and she's at the window looking for it. Anna Meier, who walks Luna often, calls her psycho dog, but of the cute variety, she says!

Slide: Warning

I don't really need to say that we humans are distracted by many things. Some days, I think I might be like a dog, but dogs don't need to accomplish tasks unless they are trained to, and dogs are able to be with the present moment better than we are. So, distractions for us are different - and we have many of them. In today's world, distraction has become more powerful than ever before because of our wonderful technologies, but also of our idolatry of our schedules. The busier we are, the more proud we can be about being busy. Have you ever asked someone

how they were and they respond, “busy”? Of course, it’s probably true, but why is that a response to how one is? I wonder.

Slide: Glass Globe

Living with distraction is now necessary in our world. I acknowledge that in my life. Perhaps you do in yours. The way I have attempted to deal with distraction in my life is by the practice of Mindfulness. Mindfulness is a simple concept but it’s hard to do: it’s just noticing what’s there in the present moment as it’s happening without judgement. Sounds easy, but in practice, it isn’t. The reason why it’s a difficult practice is because the present moment is something our brains don’t do very well. We tend to dwell more on what has happened in the past or we are constantly worrying or planning what’s in the future.

And, there are often good reasons for that. Being in the present moment often means we have to deal with hard things, with illness, or with a task we should be doing but we are not. The present moment

often shows us that we are avoiding something but when we see we are doing those things, we can learn about our distractions a bit more and find some balance. Being present is hard. And, yet, I have often found Christ there in that moment, the now, the here. It has taught me so many things about God’s presence.

Slide: Fisherman

So where am I going with all of this? Well, the disciples in today’s Gospel reading are distracted. And, in fact, it’s a simple fact that they seem to be avoiding what to do next. So, they go back to what they know – fishing. For three years, they followed Jesus. They were doing the new thing. They left their nets for the sake of that new thing. And, in fact, Jesus has already appeared to Mary Magdalene and the other women and to the twelve disciples twice as the resurrected Lord. Jesus had also already given them a mission to be sent into the world proclaiming his truth. The mission was given to them, so what do they do? Well, they go fishing instead.

But, I get it. I really don't blame them. They probably have yet to understand what has happened. No doubt they are overwhelmed with the task at hand. They are trying to get it all into their heads and hearts. Furthermore, they have to find a way to do this new mission without Jesus being physically present with them anymore. Yes, they have the gift of Christ's spirit, but who is going to lead it off? Will it be Peter?

And, Peter is the most distracted among them and I can probably guess why. He is avoiding something very painful. And, I'm certain that in seeing Jesus again in the flesh led him to that painful place all the more. For, if you remember, Peter denied Jesus three times before Jesus was crucified. Jesus told him he would do that but Peter swore on his life he would never deny him.

But, when it got dangerous, when the pressure was on, Peter simply failed. He denied that he even knew his Lord three times. I'd go fishing, too. I'd avoid having to think about it, too. And, I would not know how to respond to that

new mission at all. Moreover, up until the Gospel reading for today, Peter had unfinished business with Jesus. They had not yet had a one-on-one. Perhaps Peter wanted that but maybe he was also fearful of it.

But, let's give him a break for a second and look at the other disciples, too. They also seem to be scrambling on what to do. All they knew besides following Jesus when Jesus was alive was fishing. So, what do they do? They go to what they know instead of what they needed to do, which was to start the Christian church. They distracted themselves from what was really important, either because it was easier, or to avoid what was really relevant to their present reality.

Slide: Castanets

It reminds me of this cartoon that people often pass around Facebook. Clearly throughout the Gospels, the disciples are often mistranslating, mishearing or simply misunderstanding what Jesus wants of them. Can't we relate that to our own lives?

Slide: Fish in net

But, even in this reading for today, we can get distracted. It starts with Peter deciding to go fishing. The disciples follow. Then, they can't catch fish so a "stranger" tells them to cast their nets on the other side. Then, when they realized it's Jesus, Peter has to put on his clothes to get in the water, so what does that mean? Then, they pull the nets in with 153 fish - 153, why is that important? The nets also don't break. Why does the Gospel writer put that in there?

After that, they sit down to have breakfast. Jesus has a conversation with Peter and asks him three times if he loves him. Three times is likely significant as Peter denied Jesus three times. Is that a really important part of the story? You see how we can easily become distracted by all the details of this story without knowing the big idea?

Slide: Feed My Sheep

But, here is the crux of the story. It's what Jesus says then that's the really important thing

for our focus - FEED MY SHEEP and FOLLOW ME. We can get distracted from all the parts of the story, but when we focus upon what's important, Jesus is telling us to take care of the people Jesus loves and to follow him.

Focus on those words and avoid distraction on anything else. All those other details are interesting, but not the main thing. What is the main thing? Feed my sheep and follow me.

Slide: Trinity

Trinity Lontz - Take care of the people Jesus loves and follow him.

Slide: Tessa

Tessa Ross - Take care of the people Jesus loves and follow him.

Slide: Greta

Greta Steines - Take care of the people Jesus loves and follow him.

Slide: Sydni

Sydni Yarrington - Take care of the people Jesus loves and follow him.

Slide: Class in 6th grade

I say this with love to a small but mighty confirmation class. These young ladies have shown their compassion and kindness to each other and I have seen them also do wonderful deeds of love for others here at St. John's and in the world. But, let me just remind you something you already know, but it's just my last few words of reminders:

Jesus longs for you to continue to be in relationship with him. Confirmation is the beginning, not the end of something. You are saying yes to a marvelous journey today – a journey beginning at your baptism and leading to a place to do two things: Love God. Love people. That's what Jesus asks even in this reading today. Love the people Jesus loves. And follow Jesus.

I'm proud of all four of you because you do this already. Just be aware that the world has significant distractions to pull you away from this desire that God has for you. These distractions are powerful as you already know.

It can be tempting to “go fishing” and avoid the life of a disciple. The beautiful thing, however, is that you can start over and over again when you get distracted. God will always welcome you back and so will the people of St. John's.

In this world that befuddles and perplexes us, a world that works hard to take you away from God and carry you away with worry and distraction, remember to always come back to this: Love God. Love people. That's what this Gospel reading says and that's what the Gospel is.

So, to avoid distraction, let's bring ourselves back to the intention and purpose God has for us. In fact, let's practice it and this is for everyone here:

Slide:
People of God, do you love the Lord?

Yes, we love the Lord.

Feed his lambs.

Slide:
People of God, do you love the Lord?

Yes, we love the Lord.

Feed his sheep.

Slide:

People of God, do you love the Lord?

Yes, we love the Lord.

Feed his sheep. Now follow him.

Slide: Confirmation class

Let us not be distracted by other things that may divide us or others. "Feed my sheep", Jesus says. So, let's do this for the sake of the One for whom we say we love. Amen.