

Summerland United Church
May 5th
Fifth Sunday in Easter
Resurrection Stories: Liberated



Threshold Recently, this tweet has been making the rounds of progressive Christian Social Media, including the United Church of Canada's Broadview magazine Facebook Page. The article, written after the tweet was made, comments that the Greek word that is used in the Christian scriptures – Soteria- should be translated as "liberation," because the English word traditionally used is salvation, has become theologically saturated to mean – *only* salvation from hell and how our current lives with affect our afterlife. Whereas in ancient times soteria meant both liberation and salvation in this life, as well as the afterlife.

But as we continue to consider the resurrection stories as examples of how to unlock new-life here and now, perhaps, as Kalie May, author of the tweet, suggests we consider liberation and what it meant for the followers of Jesus to be liberated by the crucifixion and resurrection, and what it means for us in the here and now of our every day lives.

Scripture: Whether you take what is written in the bible as fact, myth metaphor or story, listen for the meaning they hold for you on this day. A reading from the book of *John* 21:9-19

⁹ When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." ¹¹ 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. ¹² 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. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

¹⁵ 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." ¹⁶ 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." ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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.”¹⁹ (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, “Follow me.”

One: May God bless our understanding of these sacred words.

All: Thanks be to God.

Reflection: Liberated.

This reading comes right on the heels of last week’s reading. We heard last week how the disciples, trying to get back to normal after the death of their friend, resume the everyday tasks of living. They go fishing. But life just isn’t the same after the death of Jesus and it never will be. And so their every day tasks bring them up empty. They catch no fish.

They remember and realize that the resurrection of Jesus means learning to live their lives in new ways. They understand that after such a loss, after such immense change, they must do things differently. And so, after remembering this they see Jesus standing on the beach, and they try to live a different way. They cast their net on the other side of the boat. By doing this, by accepting the change in their lives and living into it, they receive an abundance of fish. A catch so huge, they struggle to pull it ashore.

As they arrive, Jesus is there tending a fire and inviting them to a meal. The image we saw in the scripture passage was of the rock, where traditionally it’s believed this fire and meal took place. During the time of Jesus, it was open and on the beach. In the 5th century a church was built to surround the rock. It was destroyed in the 15th century. The church in this picture was built in the 1930’s.

So you need to imagine Jesus and his followers sitting around a fire on a beach, not in a building, for this story. They share a meal, a common thread in almost all the post-crucifixion narratives of Jesus. The early church would come to understand, as we do, the sacredness of sharing a meal. This is easy to understand because culturally as human beings eating together is something we do and have done, well, forever really.

Now, usually when a minister shares a reflection on this passage, this would be the time I would address the 3 times Jesus asks Peter if he loves him, and Peter’s 3 answers. And this is usually when a minister would toss some more Greek words at you and explain that we lose a lot in the English translations because we only have one word for love, but Greek has 4, and 2 are used in the passage – so there are really deep implications about how the love of Jesus and God is so much deeper than we can

imagine. And then I could toss out some more Greek and the subtle but important differences between the words – *Feed my lambs, tend my sheep and feed my sheep*. And how they have connotations that are also really deep.

But I'm not going to. Because I don't need too. Because you already know this. This is a preaching to the choir moment because this is what you as a community of faith already do each and every day.

You only need to look at Monday supper, the card ministry, the flowers brought each week, the cookies brought, the coffee that gets made, the visits, phone calls, emails, and all the other unnamed ways we support each other in this community and beyond. I'm sure there are dozens of things people do for the good of this community I have not named that feed, tend and nourish others as well.

We hear the words Liberation and Salvation and it's really easy to think – ok, wow that's a big thing. How can I do something as big as liberation? Because we think that means the whole world all at once, by ourselves. And I don't think that was Jesus intention either. I think he understood that liberation, justice, peace happened slowly, at the grassroots level – sometimes our actions liberate only a single person – and sometimes that person is ourselves.

And while, I support the on going work of people who want to bring liberation and justice to the whole world, I recognize that the best way I can contribute to that – is by finding ways to bring liberation and justice to the world around me.

Theres a great Ted Talk by Derek Sivers, called "How to Start a Movement" that I've been thinking about this week. He speaks about the 'second dancer' being the key figure in starting a movement. This is the example he uses. Imagine a person dancing alone in the middle of the street. Seeing that single person behaving that way – what might your thoughts be? *Ok, um are they ok? Are they a little ya know, in the head?* But if a second person goes out and starts dancing with the first person and you see 2 people dancing, you might start to think – oh, somethings going on over there. That's interesting and you might watch for a little while longer, or you might think – ya I kinda want to dance too. So you go join them. And because we are community-minded people – more people tend to join. And that's how you start a movement.

And it's exactly what Jesus says to his friends on the beach that day. He's not dancing in the street, but he is calling people to a new perspective one of justice and liberation from old practices, old habits, and moving towards new life and new ideas that are

transformative. And so, when he says, 'follow me' that's the invitation to be the second person – and that's how we start a movement towards new life and liberation.