

I have a rather boring life. It's part and parcel with the pastor gig to a degree. Unless you become a foreign missionary, being in the ministry doesn't give you much opportunity to see the world. Go to exotic places with unusual people. To indulge in adventure or danger or luxury.

But even as a pastor, I'm pretty boring. I've got one classmate out in San Diego. He's pioneering an urban ministry program. I've got at least three classmates who are working on their PhDs, writing books, and going on speaking tours. Yet another is up in Alaska, hunting bear and moose on a regular basis. If you're looking for recognition or a taste of the unknown, there are opportunities even as an ordinary parish pastor.

But I have simply no interest in all of that. My life isn't boring because I'm somehow stuck with it. It's boring because I like it boring. It's safe. It's comfortable. I like routine. I prefer things to be predictable. I'm not a thrill seeker. I'm not an adventurer. A cozy life in small town Missouri is just fine by me.

And I don't think I'm alone. As human beings, for the most part, I think we're creatures of routine. We may go off and seek an adventure every now and then. But we do so knowing that there's a home to come back to. A place of safety and stability.

So when something happens to disrupt that routine, we naturally try to find it again. And it doesn't really matter what it is that's disrupted it.

People who have recently suffered a death close to them often feel the need to get right back to work. To use the routine as a source of comfort in the midst of grief. People who have had an extended illness or injury will often try to jump right back into their former routine as soon as possible. They have cabin fever and they want to feel normal and healthy again. Even people who are on a vacation will often eventually start to think about home or think about all the work that's piling up and want to get back to it as soon as possible.

So I don't think it's terribly surprising to read what the disciples did in our Gospel lesson today. Because, after all, they're just trying to get back to some sort of routine. They've been traveling with Jesus for three years now. And for that group of men, I'm sure it was quite an adventure. Something totally outside their normal lifestyle.

But now that ministry is over. Oh, sure, Jesus is alive. And he's appearing to them. But only sporadically. Two weeks have gone by since the resurrection and he's appeared... twice. This isn't the ministry that they're used to, with Jesus right there in the center leading the way. Giving them order and purpose in the midst of chaos and danger.

Moreover, they can't live like that anymore. They've survived for the past three years on donations to Jesus' ministry. Offerings by people who came to hear Jesus speak and decided to support him. But with Jesus no where to be found six days of the week and the money drying up, well... they need to find some income.

And so they return to a routine they know quite well: fishing. After all, at least four of the eleven disciples left were commercial fishermen in their former lives. Presumably, James and John's father, Zebedee, is still running his fishing business. They apparently still have access to at least one boat.

It's a natural response. Their life has been thrown into turmoil. They're looking for stability and purpose and security again. And so they go back to a routine that they know.

And it's at this point that the disciples, and Simon Peter especially, should have been getting a bit of déjà vu. It begins with a night of fruitless fishing. They've been casting their nets for hours and gotten nothing in return. It continues with Jesus appearing on the shore, giving them instructions to go out and try again. And that is followed by a miraculous catch, almost too big to haul into shore.

It's really no wonder that John suddenly looks up with new eyes and cries out, "It is the Lord!" Of course it's the Lord! This is exactly how you began your ministry with him. That exact series of events led up to Jesus calling his very first disciples.

But this isn't just a nostalgic trip down memory lane that Jesus is leading them on. Because in many ways, Jesus really does need to start from scratch. When Jesus first encountered Peter on that dock three years prior, Peter fell on his face in humility. *"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."*

Peter doesn't react like that this time, but the thought is no less in his mind. He is Peter. His confession of faith was the rock upon which Christ's church was to be built. And yet he denied knowing his Lord in his greatest hour of need.

And it's shaken his confidence. It's probably shaken all of them. They all fled in fear when those soldiers arrived. It's no wonder they gave up on the ministry and returned to fishing. They were humbled beyond belief. For three years they had been in training and they had failed their final exam.

But Jesus isn't done with them. There is still a flock to feed and care for. They are still fishers of men. And just as Jesus had said it to Peter once years before, so also he would say it again, *"Follow me!"*

You're not allowed to give up. You're not allowed to simply go back to your routine. You're not allowed to consider yourselves failures. Follow me, follow what I have taught you, and you will still be fishers of men.

Peter needed to hear those words. We need to hear those words. Because we are just as susceptible to the same doubts and the same temptations. We are just as prone to fall into routine. To fall into the routine of sports and school events. The routine of retired life and relaxation. The routine of greed and lust and sloth. The routine of this sinful world that tries to convince us that God is dead and we should just go back to our boats and do our jobs.

We're prone to routine. And we're prone to failure. To those moments when we look at our lives and we simply say, "How can I be a disciple? There's no reason that God would want a disciple like me. I haven't proclaimed his name. I haven't defended the faith. I haven't stood by his side and done the work of his kingdom. I ran from it. I ran from him. I'm a failure."

But it's not true. Because just as Jesus didn't make a mistake when he called Peter and the disciples, he didn't make a mistake when he called you by the waters of baptism. He didn't make a mistake when he called you to be a part of his family. His church. His disciples. He has called you by name. You are his. And he has a purpose for you.

Because there are still lambs to feed. There are still sheep to care for. God still loves you and he still loves this lost world around you. And he is still calling you to follow him. No matter your failures. No matter your limitations. Follow Jesus and he will make you a fisher of men. He will find you a place by his side in his kingdom. He will give you the strength to carry out your tasks.

And even if you run away again and again, he will still show up where you are. He will still bring you a meal to sustain you in your task. And he will still lead you into his work yet again.

There are a lot of lambs to feed in this town. There are a lot of men to fish for and catch. There is a lot of work for this church to do. And yes, we have some wonderful leaders in this congregation. Teachers and council members and elders.

But this isn't their task to do alone. And when you stand before the throne of God, he is not going to ask, "Did you pay for a teacher to feed my lambs? Did you elect a Chairman for the Board of Christian Education or Stewardship & Outreach or the Board of Elders to care for my sheep?" No, he is going to ask, "Did you feed my lambs? Did you care for my sheep? Did you follow me?"

It's a tough question. It was a tough question for the disciples. It's a tough question for us. But it is also two weeks after Easter. And as those disciples found out two weeks after the resurrection of the Lord, there are always more chances to do God's work. Every day we have a God who comes to us in Word and Sacrament, flesh and blood. And every day, he looks at us anew and says, once again, *"Follow me."* Amen.