

John 21:1-19

True praise is ...

Sometimes, in my sermons, I try to build up to the point/s that I'm trying to make. Today, at the risk of having you stop listening early on, I want to tell you the point(s), right up front.

First, if something isn't working, try something else - knowing and trusting that Jesus is right there with you, to bless you and to give you a fresh start, a new beginning.

Second, we should spend every day, every moment, praising God for life; treasuring this wondrous gift that is given to us.

And third, know that life is only meaningful when we give back.

"If it isn't working, try something else, knowing that Jesus is right there with you, maybe even calling you to risk the known and to venture into the unknown."

As the story in John goes, the disciples were out fishing, and had caught nothing all night!. A spotter on the beach told them there was a shoal of fish on the right side of the boat. They threw the net out and it was so full of fish they could hardly bring it in. John suddenly recognized the spotter as Jesus, and told Peter. Impetuous as ever, Peter jumped over the side of the boat and in an instant was wading to shore. Jesus ate and drank with the disciples, then had a very important conversation with Peter. Jesus pointedly asked Peter "Do you love me more than the others do?" At once those who knew the story remembered that at the Last Supper, Peter had professed that even if all the others deserted Jesus, he would not. It was a statement that had turned into a vain boast and Peter had not been able to live up to it. He now responded from his heart. "Yes, Lord. You know that I love you." Jesus responded, "Take care of my lambs." Jesus asked the question a second and a third time, and we can tell that Peter was getting a little hurt. Then suddenly the connection washed over him. In this dramatic moment, Peter was being offered a fresh beginning. In a sense, he was being invited to try fishing on the other side, to find the courage to try something new with his life.

Try something new ... Most of us have hit a dead end at one time or another in our lives. But maybe the dead end is God's way of saying, trust me and try something new.

I read once about the people at Cheticamp, where the fishery was closed down. They decided to open a ferry to the French islands; and there's a town on the west coast that depended on its lumber mill. When it was closed, the townspeople brought in some artists to paint giant murals on all the buildings and they've turned the place into a thriving tourist town. In these two cases, they cast their nets on the other side.

Do you really love me? Jesus gave Peter a fresh start – and he expected Peter to do something new with it – feed my sheep.

Now, about praising God every moment for life. The passage from Revelation paints a beautiful picture - where every living creature from every age is gathered around the throne of God singing praises to the Lamb of God who had been slaughtered but now is standing strong and triumphant in the midst of them. It is a picture that underscores for us that in our crucified and risen Lord we are able to step out in faith to walk with him among the very stars.

There are a couple of stories about praising: There was once a woman who was running late for an appointment downtown. She had arrived at her destination ahead of time, but there



was not a parking space to be found. She went to a nearby parking lot, only to find that every space there was filled as well. Circling the block for the fourth time, she began praying, "Oh Lord, help me find a spot to park! I'm gong to be so late, and this is so important!" Even as she spoke the "Amen," a car pulled out just a few feet in front of her, right in front of the building she needed to enter. As she cheered for the opportunity, her eyes went heavenward. "Never mind, Lord, I found a spot myself." Perhaps not a true act of praising the Lord.

A better example comes from the three-act play, *Our Town*, written by Thornton Wilder. It takes place in a small town called Grover's Corners, New Hampshire. The first act of the play tells about everyday life in that village, focusing especially on two of the town's children, Emily and George. In the second act, Emily and George's love grows for each other over the years & the act closes with the two getting married.

Then in the third and final act, the scene shifts to the cemetery. Emily has died, and she now stands side-by-side with others who had passed away before her. Together they look at the life that still goes on in Grover's Corners. But in doing so, Emily is struck by the fact that no one living seems to realize just how precious each moment is. No one living seems to appreciate those seemingly insignificant moments that make up each day. And in desperation she asks: "Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it -- every, every minute?"

In heaven the elders rejoice every instant. We should strive to celebrate God's presence in our lives with the same intensity.

And, finally, the third point – life is only meaningful when we give something/everything back. Going back to Peter, we find that his life, after everything Jesus had done for and given to him was empty. Without Jesus, he was lost and despondent – until Jesus challenged him to do something new – to feed and tend the sheep – to love as Jesus had loved.

The call to love is really a call to stewardship, to give what we have, all that we have, for the sake of others – even those others we don't know, and more difficult yet, to those others of whom we may not approve.

There's a story a young woman tells about her father. She says, "My dad would have understood what Jesus was saying to Peter. One Christmas Eve in church, the place was pretty well packed, when the town drunk came staggering into church. And everybody slid over to the aisles so there didn't seem to be any place to sit. My dad stood up and motioned to him to come and sit with our family."

There's another story about a woman who was travelling in the mountains. One day, she found a precious stone in a stream. The next day she met another traveller who was hungry, and the woman opened her bag to share her food. The hungry traveller saw the precious stone and asked the woman to give it to him. She did so without hesitation. The traveller left, rejoicing in his good fortune. He knew the stone was worth enough to give him security for a lifetime. But a few days later he came back to return the stone to the woman.

"I've been thinking," he said, "I know how valuable the stone is, but I give it back in the hope that you can give me something even more precious. Give me what you have within you that enabled you to give me something more precious. Give me what you have within you that enabled you to give me the stone. [Author Unknown]"