

John 21:1-14

**“Fully Alive: The New Normal”**

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If I’ve counted right, we are 58 days into this pandemic shutdown, and **I for one am eager to get back to normal, but “normal” is not necessarily all it’s cracked up to be!**

For instance, if I get back to normal, it will probably mean that my commute ramps up, I do more laundry, and Steve and I spend more money. It will include less family time, and people may stop greeting one another along our walks. Some among us could be looking for a job instead of simply returning to one. And when it comes to re-opening church, well, at first this will involve face coverings, physical distancing, and probably no singing, since this is one of the worst culprits in spreading viruses!

The same global issues of greed and injustice will remain, and some of the tiny cracks in our relationships will have grown wider. As a pastor in a military community, I noticed, for example, that when troops were in the field, they couldn’t wait to get back to normal, meaning home to their families. At the same time, coming home was an incredible adjustment for them, particularly in family dynamics. Military values of hierarchy, command and obedience do not meld with the more democratic space of negotiation and family decision-making.

Let’s follow the adjustments Simon Peter faced. At this point in the story, it has only been a little while since he and the other disciples were in Jerusalem, living through the lowest of the lows with Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion, and the highest of the highs: the empty tomb and seeing him alive again! Jesus had instructed them to meet him in Galilee, where it had all begun. Peter must have been thrilled to return home to the seaside, to his family, and to his normal life, but it was not all it was cracked up to be. We get the impression that he and the others were at a loss. “What should we do now?” It seems to me that with a sigh, Peter declares, “I’m going fishing,” and the others, “We’ll go with you. Yeh, why not return to our work, to what we know.” Now, though, even their familiar routine is deadening. The gospel says that they stayed out all night, but caught nothing. No fish. No fun. No faith. It was life-draining instead of fulfilling.

**Peter’s story *could* just serve as a good warning to us, but it is more than that.** On several recent ZOOM meetings, our Bridge Conference Minister Don Remick has encouraged church leaders to avoid saying that the church is going *back* to what it was; rather, we are to go *forward* into a *new* normal. As basketball player Kevin Love asked in an interview: “What’s the worse thing that could happen [from this pandemic]?” replying: “That we don’t change!”

Peter changes. First, a stranger on shore advises them to drop their nets on the other side of the boat, capturing a great school of fish. Then another disciple whispers in Peter’s ear, “It’s the Lord!” Immediately, impetuously, Peter jumps in the water to get to the risen Christ, to be close to the Savior he loves. It’s like a baptism! Or as Mother Teresa referred to her decision to change from teaching children to caring for the poor in

Calcutta, it was a “call within a call.”<sup>1</sup> Or as Wuellner describes transformation, it’s “new being, new creative energy flowing from the center.”<sup>2</sup> You see, Peter is resurrected and fully alive in the company of Jesus. He can’t wait to live into *this* new normal, sharing in God’s purposes, for to love Jesus is “to shape one’s life according to Jesus’ life.”<sup>3</sup>

Like the caterpillar during the larvae stage, as individuals and as a church, we cannot know right now at this middle phase of our metamorphosis exactly what the new normal post-pandemic will be. It may require major adjustments in your relationships, and if not a new career, new dimensions of service within your current work. It will also compel RCC to be different in ways we can’t yet see, but **when in love, we eagerly choose to be close to Christ, we will become fully alive and fulfilled in this new normal!**

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<sup>1</sup>Biography.com

<sup>2</sup>Flora Slosson Wuellner, “Transformation: Our Fear, Our Longing,” *Weavings: A Journal of the Christian Spiritual Life*, Vol. VI, No. 2, March/April 1991, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup>Gail O’Day, “The Gospel of John,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. IX, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 863.