

O God, meet us this day through a word, a thought, a feeling, through scripture, song, prayer, or simply in the mystery. Amen.

I just want to say this because I know so many of us are thinking it. Zoya and Shay, thank you for the courage of your story. I know it is not easy to stand up here before all these people and speak of what you have experienced but it is an incredible honour for us to hear and to bear witness to your story, and your lives. So thank you for giving us this privilege.

I believe that hearing one another's story is one of the most holy things we can do. Genuinely hear one another's story. Bear witness to each other's lives, just as they are. Not the facebook greatest hits, or even the blooper reel, as funny as that may be. No just as they are in all their ordinariness and beauty and struggle. And I think that is one of the most important roles of the church community- to bear witness to life, to see it, to really see it, because that is the medium of God's artistry right there, in the midst of life. God meets us there- not in some holy high place, or hidden away in some text or cryptic mystery, but in the mystery and wonder and messiness of the lives we live every day.

And by the way, that is the genius of those Huddle groups that Ann Echols and others have going and that you too could be a part of. Or small group bible study, or any small group. We get to witness more intimately one another's lives, sacred works of God that they are. But I digress.

In our scriptures today, we catch a glimpse of one of those days in the lives of the disciples before they were disciples. They have been fishing for a long time and not catching much at all. They arrive back on shore and are cleaning their nets and are met by that rabbi at the lakeshore again and a crowd is gathering- you know, that rabbi from Nazareth named Jesus, the one they had heard about- the one that was going around the Galilea district speaking and healing and calling people

to a movement that was intriguing, and deep, and sounded a little dangerous. That guy. Everybody's talking about him.

They are cleaning their nets feeling discouraged. Their day of work has produced no fish- no income. Mind you, even when they do get a decent catch, they don't make much income, given how much the Roman occupiers take in taxes. The crowd is getting bigger and the rabbi asks to use their boat so that he can be heard by everyone.

He speaks for a while and then after he's finished, Jesus turns to them and says, "let's head out into the deep water and let down your nets." Now this is where the discouragement of the fishers really shows. "Seriously Jesus. We've had a long night of fishing. We have tried over and over again but it just doesn't seem to be working. You want us to try in deeper waters? Well, ok. If you say so." As the story goes, turns out Jesus knows something about fishing. The real fish are not in the shallows but in the deep. And the catch is great- scary great. Overwhelming. Simon realizes he is way over his head on fishing and probably a bunch of other things too. "Go away from me. For I am a sinful man. I am not up for this. I don't have what it takes." He and his buddies can't believe what they are seeing or hearing. It's scary, and truth be told, deep down, a little exhilarating. But Jesus responds, "Don't be afraid. Don't let the deep water you are in shake your nerve. Come. Follow me. I'll show you what we are really fishing for."

Now, as the great Biblical scholar and teacher Marcus Borg used to say when asked about the literal truth of one bible story or another, "I have no idea if this ever actually happened, but I know it happens all the time." I have no idea if the people who became followers and disciples of Jesus came to follow him in exactly this way. But I do believe that by the time this story was told later in their lives, I mean years later after so much had happened, and he had been crucified in the process of living life for the sake of a love deeper than life itself, and they had

risked it all as well, I am sure they looked back on that initial choice they made on the lakeshore and this story of it rang true.

Back then they had been fishing in shallow waters and never really getting anywhere. And then he came along and met them on a discouraging day, in the middle of ordinary, nothing special here, nothing post-worthy. And he saw them. He saw how discouraged they were. And called them to make a commitment, a real commitment, the commitment of their lives to the cause of an all-encompassing love. That love would change the way they saw themselves and each other and the world. It would shuffle their priorities, make people who were cast off in life, washed up on the shores with broken nets see how very precious they are in God's eyes. It would turn the world upside down and give them a meaning and purpose in life that was deeply good, and powerfully life-changing. Any of this ring a bell, resonate not just in Zoya and Shay's story but in yours and mine?

This morning we made some pretty spectacular commitments, to walk together in faith and bear witness to God's transforming love in the lives of Zoya and Shay but also in all of our lives and in the world. To being a community bearing witness. Because that is where God chooses to meet us, right there at the breakfast table, right there in our ordinary moments, right there on the lakeshore where we are feeling discouraged, or in the deep water of life where we are feeling overwhelmed, in the hard moments, in the beautiful moments. We promised that we would see each other's lives and in truly seeing them, see the handiwork of God. What a privilege! Amen.