

God of Resurrection, through Your Word and through these words, may you empower us to live lives of resurrection, as you move in and through our very beings. Amen

I learned a new word this week! (Who says you can't teach an old dog new tricks?!) The word is "hiraeth" [hear-eath]. It's spelled H-I-R-A-E-T-H ... I had to look up how to pronounce it!

It is a Welsh word that means "a homesickness for a home to which you cannot return, a home which maybe never was; the nostalgia, the yearning, the grief for the lost places of your past."ⁱ Hiraeth.

I suspect the disciples hiraeth is what led them back out to their boats – back to the lifestyle they had grown up with.

Afterall, their lives for the past three years have been turned upside down. First walking away from their families, friends and lives, compelled to follow this stranger that says such amazing things and performs such incredible feats. Only to have him arrested, beaten and hung on a cross to die.

Their faith in him tested, their own lives on the line, they are hiding in seclusion from anyone who might bring danger on them. Of course, they would be facing hiraeth, longing for what used to be, wishing perhaps that they had never chosen to follow Jesus in the first place.

And so, spurred on by Peter's suggestion, they go fishing, a practice they are more than familiar with. The lively-hood they once enjoyed. What's strange, however, is that these skilled fishermen, after a night on the water, catch nothing! Zippo! Zilch! Not a single fish!

So much for getting back to normal! It's almost like they've forgotten how to do it, or perhaps over the past three years, best fishing practices have changed. Who knows?!

So they sit, even more forlorn than before they got in their boats, filled with hireath – longing for something, anything that seems even halfway normal to them, something that doesn't actually even exist anymore.

It is here, now, in the midst of their ongoing dismay, that the risen Christ appears to the Disciples one more time.

"Hey guys, catch anything?" he says with a knowing snicker in his voice

The fishermen, I'm sure, want to humph him and turn away, but instead they acknowledge him and respond, "nope, nothin'"

And then, from the shore, this guy with apparently little or no fishing skills tries to tell them how to do it right. “throw your nets on the other side of the boat!”

Now don't you think any fisherman worth his weight in tuna would know to try changing locations, switching sides (although I'm not sure why all the fish would be hanging out on one side of the boat and not all around it!). Come to think of it, it's a pretty useless recommendation from this non-fisherman!

None-the-less, the disciples must figure “hey, we've been out here all night, what can it hurt to take a chance, try something we haven't tried.

And miracle of miracles, it works!! In fact, not only does it work, but the disciples nets are so full they can barely pull it in! 153 fish in all! That's a whole lot of fish! Better than any fish tale I've ever heard!

And it is then, with one more miracle before their eyes, that the Beloved Disciple, you know, the one that peaks in the tomb and instantly believes; indeed, that same faith-filled disciple looks again at the man on the shore and recognizes him for who he is. “It is the Lord!” he proclaims.

Imagine that! In times of our deepest longings, our darkest moments, in the midst of our hireath, Christ appears and shows us not how to live in a normal way, but how to live in a new way.

There is so much talk these days about opening businesses back up, people longing to get back to normal. We have been hiding away, protecting ourselves from that which might do us harm, even take our lives, and we want it to end.

We want to feel safe again, we want to know that, when we step outside our doors, we don't have to be concerned about who is approaching us, how close they might get, or what harm they might do, no matter how inadvertently. We want things to “get back to normal”. We suffer, my friends from hiraeth.

But let me remind you of the first part of the definition of this word. Hiraeth is “a homesickness for a home to which you cannot return,...”.

You know that old saying “you can't go home again”? Many people, professionals and others, are strongly suggesting that this is precisely the case for the whole world in this 21st century.

What was will never be again. There is no way to return to what we previously called “normal”. And many suggest that the old normal is about the last thing we should be longing or striving for.

Sonya Renee Taylor is a self-described “author, poet, spoken word artist, speaker, humanitarian, social justice activist and an educator.”ⁱⁱ In reflecting on this particular moment in time, Taylor writes:

“We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack. We should not long to return, my friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature.”ⁱⁱⁱ

“We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment.” This line takes me back to our gospel story and the point at which Peter, who had stripped down in the fishing boat, throws on his over-clothes and jumps into the water to run/swim to the shore and greet the Christ.

I couldn’t help but think, when I read this and especially when I watched it in the video, how incredibly burdensome that over cloak would be when drenched in water. Why would anyone put it on before jumping in the lake? Seems like a sure-fire struggle against gravity to me!

But maybe that’s the point. Maybe Christ is inviting us to leave behind that which weighs us down, whether it’s a haul of fish or an unnecessary cloak; a way of being or old habits; a disregard for the environment or a disregard for the needs of others; comfy places of familiarity or long held traditions that suited us.

Maybe, instead of living in hiraeth, longing for what was and will never be again, it is time for us to start considering the opportunities before us to stitch a new garment.

When we think about the time to come when a vaccine has been found, when Covid-19 is no longer a threat, when we are able to move through our lives more freely, how is God calling us to create a new normal?

How might we shift what we’ve always done, to allow for the continued healing of creation?

How will we alter our political systems and our social milieu in a way that will care more fully for all of humanity.

How do we need to shift our worshipping practices to better seek and serve God’s kingdom?

One thing in all of this is apparent. What we were doing, really wasn't working, at least not for everyone, not for all of God's wonderful world.

So I wonder, will we dare to try something we haven't tried?

Will we be bold enough to take a chance?

Will we trust enough to hear God's words and follow?

I wonder. And I pray that throughout this journey the words of this hymn will continually play in our heads and our hearts and play out in our lives...

"As long as we follow in the way that God is leading, we know God's reign will surely come. We know this, we know this. Yes, God's reign will surely come. As long as we follow in the way that God is leading..."

May it be so. Amen

ⁱ Other-worldly.tumblr.com

ⁱⁱ www.sonyareneetaylor.com May 2, 2020.

ⁱⁱⁱ Taylor, Sonya Renee – Twitter @sonyareneetaylor