

Sunday, May 22, 2022

Gone Fishing

(The Mission of "Catching")

(Series: "From Meetings to Mission")

(Message Five)

(John 21:1-14)

Scripture:

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: ²Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ³"I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

*⁵He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?"
"No," they answered.*

⁶He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

⁷Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. ⁸The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. ⁹When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

¹⁰Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." ¹¹So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. ¹²Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. ¹³Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Message:

For all his notoriety as a disciple, Peter doesn't look like the one to tell us how to **follow Jesus, model discipleship, or provide wisdom in how to be a Christian.**

Most of what Peter does and says in relationship to Jesus has been wrong. Not just a bit wrong, but dead wrong. He was wrong at Caesarea Philippi when, after confessing Jesus as the Christ, he tried to prevent Jesus from going to Jerusalem to be crucified (**Matthew 16:21-23**).

He was wrong on the Mount of Transfiguration when he tried to turn the glory of God into a tourist attraction for pilgrims ("*Let's build some tents...*"; **Matthew 17:4**). He was wrong at the foot washing when he tried to refuse Jesus' service (**John 13:6-8**).

He was wrong when he promised he would give his life for Jesus, but he bailed when it counted (**John 13:36-38**). He was wrong in Gethsemane at the arrest of Jesus when he impetuously cut off Malchus' ear, thinking he could serve Jesus by using violence (**John 18:10**).

(I'm not sure I'd want him for my pastor or professor. Note to Search Team, if his name is Peter, Simon Peter, make sure you check his references ☺.)

It is interesting that John finishes his gospel, not with one or two, but with three stories of **Peter as John seeks to lay out **Christ's mission** for his disciples. God can transform followers who always "get it wrong" into disciples on mission.**

In the *Prologue* (**John 1:1f** – "*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God...*") we read how God revealed himself in His Son. In the *Epilogue* (**John 21**), we read how God's now-risen Son plans to keep on revealing himself through His Word as proclaimed and shared by his disciples.

You remember Jesus revealed himself to Mary Magdalene, then later that day to his disciples gathered in the upper room, and then to Thomas the following week. People needed to "**see**" Jesus to believe he had risen from the dead!

How will that work, i.e., how will people believe, when the risen Lord has **ascended**? How will Jesus continue to **reveal** himself to his disciples? How will his **mission** go forward? How will his **Kingdom** be built?

The answer: by **catching** people (through Word and a meal), by **caring** for believers (through forgiveness and reconciliation), and by **commissioning** disciples (to be faithful to Scripture and God's mission).

In our passage today, we find Peter on a Galilean beach soon after the first resurrection week. For some reason, Peter decided to plan a night of

fishing – we’re not told why there are only seven of the eleven disciples there or where the other four were (maybe they just didn’t like fishing).

But the question is, after following Jesus for three years, enduring the drama of following him, experiencing the pain of passion week, and then having met him again face to face after his resurrection from the dead, receiving the Holy Spirit, and being sent in the world, why aren’t they already half-way around the world **on mission**. What are they waiting for?

Maybe they hesitated because they were unprepared for what had happened. Maybe they thought resurrections were about the next life; for after you die and go to heaven – not for walking the same roads they always walked. Maybe it was because, having now seen an earthly resurrection with their own eyes, they realized it changed everything – and they couldn’t quite wrap their mind around it yet.

Is Peter’s fishing trip just another one of his dumb ideas? Or does John include this “failed” fishing trip to remind us of what they and we need to do after we have met Jesus: ***From meetings to mission.***

PETER’S “CATCHING” STORY...

Peter was a fisherman by trade. It was customary to fish at night. Then, in the morning, they’d sell their fish, repair their nets, and head home to rest with a deep feeling of satisfaction.

But this morning there were **no fish**; there was no money; there was no satisfaction. They had worked all night and had nothing to show for it – except tired bodies and worn nets. Even worse, everyone knew it. When the villagers came to buy fish in the morning, they had to tell them, there are no fish.

Jesus was there that morning, **teaching**. As the people pressed closer to him, there was little room for him so he asked Peter if his boat could be a platform. Peter said **yes**. Then Peter listened to him teach.

When Jesus had finished teaching, he turned to Peter and said, “Let’s go **fishing**.” Peter groaned. The last thing he wanted to do was fish. He had fished all night; they had caught **nothing**. The boat had been clean; the nets were dry. He just wanted to go home.

And...what does Jesus know about fishing, anyway? “Master, we worked hard all night trying to catch fish.” Hear the weariness in the words: “All night!” “All night long...”

We swung the nets high. They would hit the water. We’d wait. We’d pull them in. We’d do it again: Throw. Pull. Throw. Pull. Throw. Pray. Pull. Nothing. For twelve hours! Nothing!

Nothing. It is the exact same word Jesus used when he said, “*Apart from me you can do nothing!*” (**John 15:5**).

Now Jesus wants to fish some more, and not just offshore but in the deep. Peter’s friends shrug their shoulders. People who heard Jesus teach are watching. Jesus knows a lot, but Peter knows about fishing. Peter knows when it is time to work and when it is time to quit. Common sense says it is time to quit.

The most difficult place to journey is back to the place where and/or the people with whom you failed. Jesus knows that, so he offers to **go along**: the first time you went by yourself, this time, Jesus said, “I’ll be with you.” Peter reluctantly agrees. It makes all the **difference**.

It made no sense, but Peter had been around the Nazarene long enough to know his presence made a difference: the wedding at Cana, the Ruler’s sick child, the little boy’s lunch...so, “it makes no sense, but if you say so, I will...”

The oars dip, the anchor is set, the nets fly and sink again. Peter waits...again, quietly. The others are quiet. Jesus is quiet. Then the rope jerks – hard! The net – full now – almost pulls Peter overboard.

The nets are **so full** of fish the boat dips close to the surface: John! James! Come quick! Peter, ankle deep in flopping silver, turns to look at Jesus only to find Jesus is looking at him. It is his come-to-Jesus moment.

It is an odd place to meet God - on a fishing boat on a small sea in a remote country. But it happens over and over to those willing to try again...with him. And Peter’s life was never **the same** again after that day described in **Luke 5**.

Peter had left his boat assuming he would never return. But he is back. **Same** boat. **Same** sea. Maybe even same spot. It was his go-to place, his safe place.

But it is not the **same** Peter. Three years with the Messiah have changed him. He’s seen much: the lame walking, a storm stilled, the blind seeing, and a vacated grave.

What brought him back? Despair. Maybe. He’d screwed up again. More likely, hope - hope that on the sea where he knew him first, he would know him again.

Once again, they had fished all night. Once again, they caught **nothing**. Augh! Now their thoughts are interrupted by a shout from the shore. “Catch any fish?”

Probably a villager. “No!” they yell. “Try the other side!” the voice yells back.

What? What difference would that make. But what’s the harm? Out go the nets. Wait. But there is no wait. The rope pulls taut; the net catches; Peter braces against the side of the boat and begins pulling. The result is

overwhelming. Peter is so focused on the task he misses the message. But John doesn't. It is déjà vu. The long night. The call to cast again. Fish flopping on the floor.

"It's him," John whispers. Then louder, "It's Jesus!" Then shouting, "It is the **Lord**, Peter. It's the **Lord**!"

Peter turns and looks. Jesus has come. Not just Jesus the Rabbi, but Jesus the death-defeater. Jesus the King. Jesus the victor over darkness. Jesus the God of heaven and earth is on the shore. And Jesus is building a fire.

Peter plunges into the water. On the first performance of this miracle, Peter sank to his knees and asked Jesus to just go away. This time he cannot wait to get close. Peter swims to shore, stumbles out wet and shivering, and **stands** in front of the **friend** he betrayed. Both are aware of the last time Peter had stood by a fire. Peter had failed God, but God had come to him.

One of the few times in his life, Peter is silent. This moment is too holy for words. God offers **breakfast** to a friend to one who betrayed him. **Grace** at Galilee from the **Galilean**.

What do you say in a moment like this? What do you say in a moment like this? It is just you and God. You and God both know what you did. Neither one of you is proud of it. What do you do?

You might consider doing what Peter did. **Stand** in God's **presence**. Stand still and **wait**. Sometimes that is all a soul can do. Too repentant to speak; too hopeful to leave; too awed to move. We just stand. We stand amazed.

We have heard him speak; we have joined the meal; we are *caught* by THE fisherman. It is the first step of being a disciple of Jesus – being "caught."

JESUS' "CATCHING" PRIMER

Fish (John 21:1-14) and sheep (21:15-19) speak about the work of the church. Disciples are to be fishermen, i.e., "**catchermen**," seeking those Christ calls and brings into the net, and shepherds nurturing those who have joined the flock.

In this first verse, the key word is "*revealed*" ("*appeared*" in the NIV is not a good translation; the word is used twice here; it is used a third time in **21:14**). The better word, revealed, tells us what this really is: revelation. It is about how Jesus revealed himself and how Jesus will continue to reveal himself.

These opening verses remind us of Jesus talking with the retreating disciples on the road in **Luke 24**. First, Jesus revealed the Scriptures to them; then, when he was at the table with them, breaking and blessing bread, they recognized him.

Notice these “church” stories are not located in a church facility or at a worship service or a prayer meeting; notice Jesus is not meeting with these disciples in a room behind closed doors. But these are real church stories of Jesus meeting people in their daily lives, their work lives, their family lives.

Notice the (apparent) **failure** of the fishing trip is underscored in **21:3**. The context for the Lord’s revelation (here) is not **well-prepared** disciples, it is, in fact – surprise – **failure**! Our failure is the backdrop for his **miracles**, for his **grace**, for more of **Jesus**. Failure is good manure for growth.

John pictures Jesus *revealing* himself to failing (i.e., not succeeding) disciples – not at church, but in their disappointment in their work, and in their frustrations with daily life.

Jesus seeks people who need to be caught, so he teaches us how to fish for and “catch” people. He does this using four “words.”

Jesus’ first word asks: “*Did you catch anything?*” That is, “How are you **doing?**” Jesus expresses **interest** in them. He already knows they have no fish. But people want to know we care about them. We call it empathy; it is the foundation for building trust. (*People don’t **care** how much you **know** until they **know** how much you **care**.*)

The disciples’ answer is almost rude (fishermen apparently don’t like to be asked that question – and sometimes people don’t care about our interest either).

Jesus’ second word is “*Cast your net to starboard, and you’ll find something.*” Put another way, Jesus is saying, “I have an **idea** for you to **consider**.”

What you have been doing isn’t working. Are you open to something **different**? *They were, so they did.* It makes all the **difference**.

The miracle in this story is that the disciples follow the advice of this stranger. Trying the other side is no small request; it is hard work to move the heavily weighted nets from one side to the other. But even after a long night, they were still open to trying.

You may be hurting, grieving, alone, feeling guilty; your life may a mess. Are you (we) open to someone different? What we have been doing isn’t working. Doing something different could make all the difference.

John wants to impress us with their obedience to Jesus’ invitation; the invitation comes with an authority and timing even seasoned fisherman responded to. Jesus’ word, when it is obeyed, is “catching.”

Jesus, you may remember, initially recruited them by asking, “*Follow me, and I will make you ‘catching’ with people!*” (**Matthew 4:19**). Jesus then spent years teaching them to “catch.” Notice, Jesus’ invitation was not, “*Follow me*

and I will save your soul.” It is *“Follow me and I’ll help you catch people.”* Being a disciple is more about **“catching” people** than it is about getting ourselves saved.

The fish in this story represent the people the disciples will “catch” when the disciples simply obey Jesus’ clear commands. It is important to remember that fish aren’t caught when the fish obey, but when the fishermen do; the harvest is not brought in when the sheaves obey, but when the harvesters do; the church doesn’t grow when unbelievers obey, but when the followers of Jesus do.

Are we obeying? Are we loving and forgiving one another? Are we reading our Bibles? Are we tithing? Are we praying together? Are we building one another up? Are we sharing the Gospel?

When John tells Peter, *“It is the Lord”* (21:7), Peter moves quickly toward **Jesus**. A faithful disciple telling someone, *“It is the Lord”* is the human means God uses to bring people to Jesus. The Church, in **everything** they do - sermons, lessons, conversations - must be pointing people to **Jesus**. Christ’s mission to “catch” people for Jesus.

Jesus’ third word is, *“Bring some of the fish you just caught”* (21:10). That is, *“I’d like to use what you have.”* (Note: Jesus doesn’t **need** their fish, he already has fish on the fire.)

But Jesus wants to use us and our **gifts** in the fulfillment of his **mission**. Jesus could have said, *“Bring some of the fish I just caught using you...”* (The catch of fish is really his miracle). But God is graciously willing to use us on his mission, and he graciously “credits” us with the catch (He does it all, but because of his relationship with us, he makes us partners).

The net was filled with one hundred and fifty-three huge fish (21:11b). The basic meaning of this phrase is that simple obedience to Jesus’ miracle-working Word will, all by itself, enable us as disciples to be wonderfully catching and fruitful.

Jesus says, *“Here is how my Father is glorified: when you bear much fruit and so show that you have been disciplined by me”* (John 15:8).

Jerome, an early church Father, asserts there were 153 different known types of fish in Jesus’ day. The inference is that everyone can be included: rich and poor, young and old. This is a call to the Church to throw their net **wide** and God will bless it.

Jesus uses this picture not only to **teach** and command evangelism and discipleship but also **ecumenism** and Church harmony. Jesus says, *“Here is how everyone out there will know that you are my disciples, namely, by the way you have a heart for one another”* (John 13:35).

Jesus' fourth word here is, "*Come and have breakfast.*" I.e., let's **eat together**. Come, let's start the new day, our new life, together. **Word** and **meal** go together. Notice, it is during this meal that the still somewhat hesitant yet re-believing disciples are **convinced**, "*It is the Lord!*" As with the disciples walk to Emmaus, it was in the breaking of the bread that they recognized, "*It was the Lord.*"

There is something very **personal**, **intimate**, and **communal** about eating together. Jesus not only wants to be our teacher; he not only wants to be our Savior; he wants to be our table companion. The discipleship lesson here is that what begins as a caring interest develops into intimacy around Jesus. Have meals with friends. Invite them to do life with you. They will see Jesus in you. It is that elementary.

Jesus comes – to his disciples and the world, in worship and work, in our presence and obedience, through word and meal – to change the world.

It is the **testimony** and **profession**, the witness, that Jesus is Lord (noted three times in this passage) that brings people on shore to come **face-to-face** with Jesus and **change** their life. "*It is the Lord*" became the church's earliest profession of faith and witness to the world. It must be ours as well.

Prayer:

Father, thank you for raising Jesus from the dead and for providing us hope in the middle of our guilt, our grieving, our pain and our life's messes.

Open our eyes so we might recognize "*It is the Lord.*" Give us the courage to come ashore to meet Jesus face to face, to seek his forgiveness and reconciliation, to hear his word of revelation and join him for a breakfast at the beginning of a new day and a new life.

Father, make us catchers of people like Jesus was (and is) as we follow him on mission. Father, Son, Spirit, we love you.

In the name of the risen Christ. Amen.