

The Big Catch & Calling

by

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John 21:1-14

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. ²Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. ³Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you."

They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. ⁴Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." ⁶He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. ⁷That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. ⁸But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

⁹When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. ¹⁰Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." ¹¹So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large

fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹²Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, “Who are you?” because they knew it was the Lord. ¹³Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Of all the gospel writers, John is the one who has quite a way with words. In the Fourth Gospel, language and images are layered with meaning. Just think of all the images John uses to describe Jesus himself – Word, Light, Good Shepherd and Gate to the sheepfold and Vine; the Way, the Truth and the Life. John uses language carefully, as if to say mere words can only point to the divine revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, John layers the gospel with meaning so that every interaction appears to disclose hidden secrets about God’s abundant grace spilling over into the world God so loves.

When the wine runs out at the wedding in Cana, Jesus saves the party by turning gallons of water into wine – a mere sign of more abundant life to come. When Jesus makes a simple request for a drink of water on a hot afternoon in Samaria, the conversation with the Woman at the Well expands to a discovery of Living Water. The healing of a blind man by a mixture of mud and spit and a cleansing pool of water becomes a powerful lesson on spiritual blindness, and how to perceive the presence of God in the midst of a world of suffering.

Someone has noted that it is almost as if underneath the whole Gospel of John there is a vast hydraulic system, and as the gospel story unfolds the cleansing, redeeming baptismal waters of God’s grace erupt – here and there – wherever the divinity of Jesus is revealed. ¹ As Jesus walks through a

¹ Tom Long made note of this at a Moveable Feast preaching seminar.

parched land and weary lives, signs of new life spring up everywhere to overflowing.

So it is not surprising to me, that the last of Jesus' resurrection appearances takes place at the seashore with such a large haul of fish they cannot lift the net into the boat. Like the other resurrection appearances, at first the atmosphere is charged with despair, and this one even has a tone of resignation. "I am going fishing," Peter says, as if to say, "It's time to get back to life as it used to be, get back to normal, return to the usual rhythms of life and work, to go back to being who I used to be." "We will go with you," the others chime in.

Then a story unfolds to present the resurrection as something that happened not only to Jesus but also to his followers. There is no going back to the way things used to be after the Risen Lord has shown up in their daily lives again. The fullness of Jesus' resurrection is that it impinges on us; it reclaims and redirects Jesus' disciples! The gospel is letting us know that by the power of Jesus' resurrection the disciples are raised to a new way of being in the world. You can fish all night long by yourselves and come up with nothing, or you can heed Jesus' word and come up with a haul so abundant you can barely believe it. This resurrection appearance unfolds as a commissioning of the disciples – to continue doing what Jesus commands us to do. Jesus says to those fishermen, bring some of what you have to me, and join me for breakfast on the beach.

Lutheran pastor, David Lose, makes note of this invitation saying, "I think there is something very powerful here, as Jesus not only provides for the disciples, but also invites them to contribute what they have and, by extension, who they are. As they join what they have to what Jesus provides, they are drawn back into the fellowship of those who see and believe."² They add their gifts to the promise of new life Jesus has given them, and there is no telling where they will carry the good news of God's abundant life and grace unleashed in the world. I bet by now, you remember – we have heard this

² David Lose, "Commissioned Yet Again," Dear Working Preacher, 2013, textweek.com.

story before, earlier in the gospel. *Jesus took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.* This is the loaves and fishes story all over again – bathed in the light of resurrection! ³ By the sea, it is the renewal of their baptismal vows to share in the work of Jesus himself.

Friends, while we have been hunkered down in this season of Eastertide I have found the post-Easter texts over these last few weeks to be a great source of comfort. They have reminded us that God is with us; God is with us even in this odd and disconcerting pandemic season. But God needs more from us than mere comfort and trust. The Risen Lord appeared to the disciples so as to equip them with new life to do the work he had begun.

You know I have had countless conversations with church members, family and friends about how we are coping in these challenging days. What I have noticed is that most of us have gone through a “Woe is me” phase. This phase has usually been accompanied by a self-conscious, dramatic and often comical description of life in quarantine. Trying to teach our children things we never had to learn ourselves, no haircut, living in sweat pants, you name it. But when you get below the surface of things, you discover folks are finding ways to serve.

I am amazed at the creative endeavors of genuine discipleship just now. People are being kind to neighbors they barely knew before, offering to get food and essentials and anything they need. People are calling and caring for friends they haven’t talked to in years. Children are taking dry erase markers and painting pictures on the windows of nursing homes to the delight of seniors on the far side of the glass. This church is continuing to receive generous financial support to our Hunger Fund which is enabling us to raise contributions to our ministry partners in this community and in the city.

This is only a glimpse of our lives layered with the meaning of resurrection, heeding the command of Jesus to cast our nets in another direction, and to haul in an abundance of goodness that we then share and

³ John 6:1-14.

distribute. According to the Gospel of John, the resurrection of Jesus transformed us into a life of discipleship doing his work – praying, teaching, healing, feeding, and redeeming the world.

Do you remember the very last verse of John’s Gospel? “But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.”⁴

This is our time to enact God’s good works through the Risen Christ, so that the next chapter of the gospel is written across the pages of our lives.

AMEN.

⁴ John 21:25.