

## Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

(May 1, 2011)

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Sermon manuscript

### EASTER SUNDAY

#### Gone Fishin’

(John 21:1-13)

#### Introduction: Great Commissions we have known and loved...

In each of the four Gospels, the story of Jesus extends past both the crucifixion and the resurrection to at least one more event. After these defining events, there is some defining exchange between Jesus and His disciples.

Matthew and Mark (if you accept the longer ending) give us slightly different versions of the Great Commission. Luke gives us the interview on the road to Emmaus.

And, as usual, John gives us a completely unique and intensely personal post-resurrection scene, a scene that takes place in Galilee. It is to John that we will briefly look this morning.

We meet up with seven of the remaining eleven apostles at the beginning of John, chapter 21.

Jesus has appeared to them twice already to persuade them to have faith. This appearance is to push them toward faithfulness.

#### Peter: I’m Going Fishin’ (vv. 1-3)

#### Seven Disciples All Together (vv. 1-2)

*[1] After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested Himself in this way.*

*[2] Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together.*

They had come together at what John calls here, the Sea of Tiberias, the body of water we usually refer to as the Sea of Galilee.<sup>1</sup>

The region of Galilee would have been rich with memories for all of the disciples, as this is the region where they had all met Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

The gloom of Good Friday was history. They were out of the pressure cooker that was Jerusalem. They were on home turf in Galilee, by the sea. And on this particular day Peter voiced his plan of action.

#### **They All Go Back to Work (v. 3a)**

*[3a] Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will also come with you.”*

Today, the phrase, “I’m goin’ fishing” carries a certain connotation. In some circles, “I’m going fishing” is the ultimate kick-back-and-take-it-easy phrase. “I’m going fishing” = “I need to get away from it all.”

That’s **NOT** what Peter meant. Peter was a professional fisherman. For him, “I’m going fishing” meant, “I’m going to work.”

And when Peter and company went fishing, it was work! They didn’t take rods and reels. They fished with heavy nets. And they didn’t fish during the daytime.

No, they knew fish bite better at night, so they threw their nets all night long.

<sup>1</sup> In John’s day, Tiberias Caesar was the ruler of the Roman Empire, and the large inland lake was - at least temporarily - named after the Emperor.

<sup>2</sup> Judas was not from Galilee. His name - *Iscairiot* means “a man from Kerioth” a city in Judea.

On this particular night, Peter and his friends had a Dave Smith fishing trip. These experienced, professional fishermen didn't get so much as a nibble. They got skunked.

### **Getting Skunked on the Water (v. 3b)**

**[3b]...They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing.**

I can relate. My fishing trips are usually very clean affairs. I never have to mess with the smelly job of cleaning fish. I'm not bothered carrying a heavy stringer of fish from the lake or the river to the car.

The fish see me coming and lose their appetites. They contract terminal lock jaw.

Maybe you can relate. If so, you and I and these disciples have had a shared experience in NOT catching fish.

Well, just as morning was breaking, they called it a night and rowed toward shore. Jesus was waiting for them, *incognito*, as they rowed in, and He did two things that I would never do.

### **Fishing with Jesus (vv. 4-7)**

#### **An Interesting Greeting (vv. 4-5)**

*He called them "children"...*

**[4] But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.<sup>3</sup> [5] So Jesus said to them, "Children..."**

When you next go to Corpus Christi and see seven tough, rugged men bringing their boats to shore after a night of hard work, fishing, I do not recommend that you address them with, "Children..." It might get their attention, but probably not in the way you hope.

Then, He called attention to their failure to catch fish.

*He called attention to their failure...*

**[5]...“Children, you do not have any fish, do you?”**

Again, if you see seven guys rowing in to shore after an unsuccessful all-night fishing excursion, it is generally not a good idea to yell out, "Hey, I see you didn't catch any fish!"

But, if these questions would show our foolishness, they show Jesus' wisdom.

Following their answer - a brusque "No!" - He offered a suggestion, another questionable move.

#### **Some Risky Advice Giving (v. 6a)**

**[6a] And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch."**

There is nothing more frustrating to fishermen, auto mechanics, athletes, or plumbers than listening to an arm-chair quarterback. And it might have seemed to them that he was being just that.

I've listened with great interest when, on occasion, a reporter will question Gregg Popovich about a coaching move in a Spurs game. Pop can give a withering look and his responses are sometimes so sarcastic, they're classy.

(I actually found a couple of pretty good clips, but they weren't quite appropriate for Sunday morning viewing.)

Well, here is THIS GUY telling THEM - professional fishermen! - who have been out fishing all night long, how to fish.

Still, they took the Stranger's advice - and that speaks well of the disciples. I guess they figured that they couldn't do worse than what they had already done, which was to catch ZERO fish.

<sup>3</sup> Remember the problems identifying Jesus in chapter 20, also in Luke 24, Matthew 28.

## A Dangerously HUGE Catch (v. 6b)

***[6b]...So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish.***

So, are we to assume that they hadn't tried fishing off the right side of the boat during the night? Did the disciples hear Jesus' suggestion and think, "*Oh, we didn't know we could fish off the right side, too...*"

Of course they had tried both sides. Their tactics had not changed. It was Jesus who sent the fish scurrying into their nets.

And as soon as John saw the fish racing for the nets, something clicked.

## Eyes Open to the Master Fisherman (v. 7)

*John recognized Jesus (v. 7a)*

***[7a] Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved<sup>4</sup> said to Peter, "It is the Lord."***

John was the first to perceive that it was Jesus. But it was Peter who was the first one to do something about it.

*Peter swam to Jesus (v. 7b)*

***[7b]...So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea.***

I guess I can understand why some might read this as Peter trying to harm himself, overwhelmed by guilt over past failures.

But I don't think so. I think Peter threw himself into the sea because he wanted to see Jesus, and he knew that swimming was the quickest way to get to shore.

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<sup>4</sup> This is how John characteristically referred to Himself. His self-identity was wrapped up in being loved by Jesus.

The others stayed in the boat, dealing with the heavy load of fish without Peter's help, and came in with the little ship's boat in the more traditional way.

The subsequent beach scene shows Jesus and His men enjoying a reunion around fish tacos.

## Lessons From a Fishing Trip (vv. 8-13)

### Disciples Arrive at the Beach (vv. 8-11)

***[8] But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish. [9] So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it, and bread. [10] Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have now caught." [11] Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn.***

I'm intrigued by the counting of the fish - and many others have been similarly intrigued. John doesn't tell us that there were "about one hundred and fifty" fish. He was precise to the last fish - one hundred and fifty three.

Not surprisingly some Bible commentators have suggested that "one hundred and fifty three" stands for something.

- One said that "153" was the accepted number of species of fish in Jesus' day, so what is in view is the universality of Jesus' offer of salvation to all kinds of people.
- Another person noted that if you add the numeric value of the Greek letters in the name "Simon" (76) to the numeric value of the letters in the word "fish" (77), you get 153.
- Somebody else realized that the Trinity is represented by multiplying 3 and 50 and then adding 3!

For myself, not being much interested in numerology, I think that the point of telling us the number is to make sure that we know that they caught a bunch of fish.

As they prepared to eat, John tells us in deliciously memorable words how Jesus distributed the food to them.

### **Jesus Served Fish and Bread (vv. 12-13)**

*[12] Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples ventured to question Him, “Who are You?” knowing that it was the Lord. [13] Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise.*

If those words sound familiar, it’s because it is nearly the exact same working Jesus used (John 6) when He broke the bread and distributed the fish at the feeding of the five thousand.

For that miracle, the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus multiplied fish and loaves. He was responsible for making sure that all those in the crowd received the food. The disciples were in charge of distribution.

Today, I think John wants us to see two crucial truths from this scene of Jesus with His disciples.

### **Conclusion:**

*A look inside...*

**FIRST**, you and I are to serve people with the resources Jesus provides. We are always dependent on Jesus for supply and we are always to be quick to use His supply to serve others in His Name.

Now, watch this. Here in John 21, Jesus took professional fishermen to the sea to show them that they had to depend on Him. Where will Jesus take you? Where do you shine? Where do you most excel? Where is your greatest expertise?

Isn’t it likely that Jesus will convince you that even there, where you really know what you are doing, you need to trust him?

If Peter and the rest needed to trust Jesus on the Sea of Galilee, they needed to trust Him everywhere.

And you and I need to trust Him everywhere and at all times, too, to supply us with the resources we need to bring blessing to others.

But there is a second crucial truth that arises from this beach scene. And that is that fishing is very close to the heart of Jesus.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record Jesus saying something like this to His first disciples when He called them to follow Him: *“So far in your life, you’ve been fishing for fish. Follow Me, and you’ll catch people who will join you in following Me.”*

John didn’t include that remark at the start of his book, so he includes it here at the end to assure us that Jesus is all about fishing.

Once, someone lovingly “fished” for you and brought you to God. Now, it’s your turn to “fish” for your friends and lovingly bring them to God.

The world in which you traffic from day to day is your Sea of Tiberias. That is where you are to fish. Let down your nets.

Jesus wants us to go fishing - and we “fish” as we lovingly share the good news that Jesus saves.

*A look ahead...*

This morning’s brief meditation in John 21 has highlighted the heart of Jesus for those who are lost. He desperately loves people and intends that we who know Him are to be all about helping others come to know Him as we do.

BUT our time in God’s Word today has also been to prepare us for an adventure we are beginning next Sunday.

Beginning on May 8<sup>th</sup>, we are going to begin a stroll through the life of Jesus, allowing Mark to be our guide.

Please pray that God will use Mark’s Gospel to catapult each of us into **fishing** and **servng** and **worshipping** as we observe the breathtaking pace and scope of the incredible life of Jesus Christ.