

Christ is risen!

“I am going fishing”: The famous last words of a fisherman. The fisherman’s name was Peter. This morning we’re going to talk about Peter’s last fishing expedition and what it has to do with our walk with God and with one another.

OPENING PRAYER

JOHN 21:1-14: After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberius, and he revealed himself in this way. ² Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. ³ Simon 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.

⁴ Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, “Children, do you have any fish?” They answered him, “No.” ⁶ He said to them, “Cast the net on 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 of the quantity of fish. ⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. ⁸ The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.

⁹ When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” ¹¹ So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” Now none of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it

to them, and so with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

The Gospel began with these words: **“After this Jesus revealed Himself again to the disciples....”** These words, **“After this,”** connects the previous story with the following one. The earlier story was about how the disciples were hiding out behind locked doors for fear of the Jews after Jesus had been crucified. Jesus came to them and said, **John 20:21-23, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you.” And then he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.”**

The account of Jesus breathing on the disciples is parallel to what God did when he created Adam out of clay and breathed life into him. Later, through the prophet Ezekiel, God said he would breathe life into the dry bones of Israel. This is what God does: He breathes life, his own life, into his children whom he loves.

After breathing life into his disciples, Jesus told them the most remarkable thing: He was giving them the power and responsibility to forgive sins. In other words, he was making them like himself, “little Christs,” as Luther said, that is, people who have the power to breathe life into other people.

That’s the prelude to today’s Gospel, which takes an unexpected turn. The disciples were back home in Galilee, and they were sitting around staring at each other, as though there was nothing else to do. Despite the Lord’s commission to minister to the world with the forgiveness of sins, they were just sitting on their hands.

So Peter, always the first one with a bright idea, said, **“I am going fishing.”**

Even after his intense seminary education, that is, listening to and following Jesus around for 3-years, Peter didn’t get it. He returned to his comfort zone: Fishing. And the way he said it – **“I am going fishing”** – indicated that he intended to return to fishing as a career probably forever.

It was evening, and Peter and the others got into the boat and went fishing and **“they caught nothing.”** In that region, night fishing was the best kind of fishing, but they couldn’t catch even one lousy fish. That must’ve been depressing. They were empty now: Empty net, empty boat, and empty hearts.

But as they were still out in the water Jesus called to them, **“Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.”** The disciples looked at each other, shrugged their shoulders, and said, “Why not?” And they cast the net on the right side of the boat and, voila, they pulled in so many fish their vessel nearly capsized!

We read that there were 153 fish. Let’s amuse ourselves for a moment with what some commentators have said about the number 153:

- If one adds up the numbers 1 thru 17, as in $1+2+3$, etc., the result is 153. Seventeen is the numbers 10 and 7 added together. And as everyone knows, 10 is for the 10 Commandments, and 7 is for the 7 gifts of the Holy Spirit!
- Others point out that in Greek and Hebrew numerology, one would add up the numerical value of names and words for hidden meanings. If one adds up the numerical values of the letters in the name “Simon,” you get 76, and the word “fish” equals 77, and what do you know, “Simon’s fish” equals 153!

On the other hand, sometimes a cigar is just a cigar. I think John gave us the number of fish in precise terms so that, number one, we would understand that this is an historical event. It really happened. And, number two, that it was a miracle. There had been no fish, but then there was a net-busting load of fish, enough to nearly sink the boat.

Consider how Peter, a fisherman’s fisherman, could not find a single fish in the sea. But Jesus showed him the way. There is irony in this. With Jesus’ history as a carpenter and itinerant evangelist, there was no record that he ever fished a single day in his life. Nonetheless, he knew where the fish were.

And this is the most important part of this story: Jesus showed the disciples that he was the Lord of ALL Creation.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus died for our sins and gifted us with eternal life with his resurrection. And then he breathed life, his life, into us beginning with the disciples, a breath which his Spirit has sustained in the Christian church for two millennia, bringing his life into our mortal bodies and into all creation for eternity.

Jesus knows where the fish are.

Friends in Christ, Jesus knows your heart, and he wants to fill it with his love. He knows your deepest fears and he wants to replace them with his life. He knows the path you trod and he wants to bathe it in his light. When we relinquish ourselves to him, his light, his love, and his life are ours.

When I consider our political climate I'm frustrated by the tribalism of the parties which crushes the American spirit. But Jesus said, "**My kingdom is not of this world**" (John 18:36). And St. Paul wrote, "**But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ**" (Philippians 3:20).

Our Lord is with us here in this world, but he has a greater plan, an eternal plan, which supersedes the foolishness of this world, which is our hope.

Jesus knows where the fish are.

When I see the hardships of the homeless, many of whom are not to blame for their situation, I'm saddened. The author of Hebrews tells us, "**Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it**" (Hebrews 13:2). I know in my heart the Lord is with me when I have the opportunity to help even one person in need.

Jesus knows where the fish are.

I am filled with sorrow when I reflect on the abuse, the hunger, and the neglect millions of children around the world suffer every day. But Jesus said, **“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Matthew 19:14)**. We’re little Christ’s to the world, especially to the little one’s whom the Lord has brought to us to minister to.

Jesus knows where the fish are. He is the master of creation. He is lord of all, even our own lives, and he loves you. He has breathed his life into you and me, and he will bring forth fruit from our lives and from our ministry together in this church.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this week let us give thanks for how the Lord has given us life with his life.

Let us look for ways to use our lives to bring life to the world around us.

And let us share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.

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