

First Presbyterian Church
“Fishing with Jesus,” John 21:1-14
by Pastor Matt Johnson, 5/1/2022

Above the dishwasher here at church is a list of steps to ... run the dishwasher.

If you follow the steps, it works.

One of our wonderful sound techs told me recently
that after unsuccessfully troubleshooting an issue,
one of them looked at the other and said,
“Well, we might have to look at the directions.”

There are many activities in life like this.

Find out what you’re supposed to do and in what order,
and things will go great.

But there are other activities are hard to pin down with a list of “to-dos.”

Following Jesus is one of them.

Especially when your world gets turned upside down.

John 21 challenges us to share in the grand surprises
of what God’s love draws us into
rather than go through a set of “things to do.”

When life in God’s Kingdom understood as a set of things to accomplish
it is either burdensome, a point of pride, or both.

When God’s Kingdom is abiding with the one who loves us,
it is a surprise gift which results in supernatural outcomes we cannot control.

After Jesus had been raised from the dead,
he appeared a few different times to the disciples.

In this particular scene, there were some key players
gathered together -- Peter, Nathaniel,
James & John (the sons of Zebedee)
and ... two others who obviously don’t matter.

Peter says, "I'm going out to fish."

Kind of out of the blue, and perhaps totally innocuous.

Unless Peter was like us ...

not really knowing what steps he was supposed to follow.

Without a clear direction, he goes back to his old default trade as a fisherman in the Sea of Galilee.

The others respond "We'll go with you," just like a bunch of guys would today.

As I read it, this is just where they were at.

They had no specific goals to pursue in light of the resurrection, no direction to head in, so they may as well go fishing.

That's what this group of disciples do. They decide to go fishing.

Can you believe it?

After all that Jesus had been through in his struggle against oppressive political and religious powers, his tortuous death on their behalf, miraculous appearances to them after resurrection, and his breathing the Holy Spirit upon them, saying, "as the Father has sent me, so I send you," they're just going fishing?

Jesus is gonna be so mad at them.

Indeed, it says in verse 4,

"Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, and the heat of his fiery rage glowed in his eyes like a refiner's fire."

Well, okay it just says that he stood there, but we *know* he's really mad, right?

Because God would never just meet us

when we're doing what we like to do...right?

Here it is in v. 5 – After a whole night fishing he calls out to them,
“Friends, haven’t you caught any fish?”
They say, “No.”

Okay, I’ll be Jesus, you be the disciples.

Imagine you’ve been fishing all night long and how depressed
you would be having not caught anything.

“Friends, haven’t you caught any fish?” “No.”

“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.

It turns out, Jesus isn’t mad. He doesn’t care if they go fishing or not.
He’ll meet them, direct them, and empower them wherever they are at.

Far from a moment of judgment, this post-resurrection encounter
is a parable of grace that changes how we serve God here and now.

Jesus doesn’t need you to find the perfect job, be a perfect person,
join the perfect church, or follow all the steps in the directions.

Because Jesus is risen, he will meet you wherever you are at.

And he’s not mad at you! Is that not good news?

Secondly, because Jesus is risen, we do not have to save the world.

In v. 7, the disciples recognize that this shore-line advice giver
is none other than “the Lord,” Jesus himself.

What follows is included in John’s gospel as a kind of
parable for what life with Jesus is like after the resurrection.

According to v. 7, Peter was fishing naked

(which is not something I ever saw in the story books as a kid)

so when he realizes Jesus is on shore,

he wraps something around himself and dives into the water.

Everybody else follows with the boat, and the haul of 153 fish.

The great skill of Peter as a fisherman resulted in no fish at all.

But the way of faith resulted in a massive haul that they could hardly tow to shore.

It's not how smart you are, how talented you are, how much you can do, or how many people you can help.

Those aren't what counts in God's Kingdom.

What counts is God's grace and love poured through our lives in humility.

When they get to the beach they find a very odd scene.

In v. 9 we read of Jesus sitting by a fire, with fish on it and some bread.

Jesus says in verse 10, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught."

Did you catch that?

The fire has fish on it. Already. Before they show up.

Jesus doesn't need their fish.

He's already cooking some up before they arrive.

Jesus doesn't need our fish either.

- Doesn't need my preaching.
- Doesn't need your praying.
- Doesn't need our singing.
- Doesn't need our food programs.
- Doesn't need our money.
- Doesn't need our good ideas or behind the scenes efforts.
- Jesus already has plenty of resources.
 - He sits on the throne of heaven, after all!

Now this could be taken as a slap in the face

but that's only if we hang onto our pride.

What activities do you engage in that need this same kind of re-orientation in light of the work God has already accomplished in Christ?

Friends, we do not have to save the world.

This is a word to all of us who wrestle with our own pride
or a need-to-be-needed.

God can accomplish God's work without us very easily.

The flip side of letting go of our pride, is letting go of our burdens.

I'm not letting Jesus down if I don't bring in a huge haul of good-deeds –
he's got the "getting things done part" taken care of.

This frees me and you up to simply focus on loving Jesus
apart from all the guilt and heavy burdens.

That's a freedom that comes specifically because of the fact that Jesus is risen.

Because Jesus is risen, he will meet us right where we're at,
and we don't have to save the world.

But there's still more to it than that.

Because Jesus is risen, he dignifies our participation in God's kingdom

This is the second half of that odd scene we just encountered.

Yes, Jesus has already got the fish frying up.

But then he says, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught."

Not to be a jerk, but uh...they didn't really catch those fish, did they?

They fished all night and caught nothing,

and it was only because Jesus performed miracle

when they threw their nets over the other side of the boat

that this massive school of fish

suddenly filled their nets.

But he says, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught."

That's beautiful. Jesus dignifies their role in catching the fish.

In the same way, Jesus dignifies our role in the kingdom life he has inaugurated.

Though he does not need our efforts, he calls them forth,

bleses them, and honors us for being conduits of his love.

This is like a master electrician doing the wiring for a huge house,
and when being complimented on the work, the electrician says,
“Don’t thank me -- I couldn’t have done it without that copper wire.”

We are like copper wire in the hands of Jesus.

We hardly deserve credit for the power that flows through our lives,
and yet Jesus has chosen to use us for his purposes in the world.

Next time you feel alone in your life ... remember Jesus
meeting the disciples when they were tired of waiting around
and decided to go fishing. He’ll meet you where you’re at, too.

Next time you feel exhausted, like you can’t work any harder,
or that you are apathetic and life just doesn’t seem to matter ...
remember that Jesus has already done all the doing
that needs to be done –
our productivity is not the most important thing to God.

And the next time you feel like God has forgotten about you,
left you without a purpose or a reason to continue ...
remember that Jesus both showed the disciples
where to catch the fish *and* invited them
to throw some on the fire with the fish he already had.

Sitting down with the disciples,
Jesus took bread, and he broke it and he gave it to them.
They ate some fish, too.

In the same way, Jesus invites us to this table today.
As we sing, let us also prepare ourselves to share in this holy meal
with our gracious and loving God.