

Fishermen for Jesus
John 21:1-14
April 14, 2013

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. "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. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. He 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. Then 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. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Today's Gospel reading is all about fishing and fishermen. And just as there are different kinds of fishing there are different kinds of fishermen. The fishermen in today's Gospel reading are about to change from the kind of fishermen they used to be to the kind of fishermen the Lord wants them to be. As we look at this encounter between these fishermen and their Savior, we will also consider how this applies to us as modern day fishermen of Jesus.

John tells us that the disciples had moved from Jerusalem to Galilee. The Sea of Tiberias and the Sea of Galilee are different names for the same sea. It's important that the disciples make this move because Jesus had told the women who had gone to the tomb to go and tell his disciples that he would meet them in Galilee. So, with the disciples back on home soil, let's take up the details.

Once back at home, the disciples do what comes most naturally for them. They go fishing. Remember that most of the disciples had been fishermen before they met Jesus. So fishing was just the thing to do. Besides, disciples like Peter still had a family to provide for. Fishing was the way they knew to keep the bills paid and food on the table.

Okay, the disciples go fishing. Is that what they should be doing? I just gave you a couple of good reasons why they would go fishing, but do you think that fishing is what Jesus had planned for the rest of their lives? The answer is yes and no. Yes, Jesus had told his disciples that they would be fishermen. But also, no, because here they are still

thinking about being fishers of fish instead of fishers of men.

For the disciples to be fishing isn't wrong but it isn't what Jesus wanted them to be doing. Their goals weren't the goals of God. While what they were doing wasn't necessarily a sin, it wasn't accomplishing anything that mattered for eternity and God wants his people working for things with eternal value. How often have we been like these disciples? We're fishing, but we're after the wrong catch. It's very easy for us to get caught up in the details of life and forget the things of God.

When this happens, we will eventually find the same results the disciples found out on the sea that night. The disciples came up with empty nets. They were expending their efforts in the wrong direction and all of their efforts came to naught. If we follow their example, we will find the same.

If we spend our lives working for the things of this world, we will only end up agreeing with King Solomon: *Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun* (Eccl 2:11 NIV). Lives spent outside the will of God are empty and meaningless lives. Energy spent chasing the wealth of the world is energy wasted.

But thank God this isn't the final word. When the disciples head off in the wrong direction, Jesus shows up to realign their steps. Let's go back to the text. Jesus appears on the shore and calls to the disciples: "*Children, do you have anything to eat?*" That's what it says in the Greek. And we'll come back to that later.

The disciples answer, no. Jesus tells them to throw the nets over the right side of the boat. By the way, notice that even as a stranger on the shore, the command of Jesus carries so much authority the disciples obey without question.

When the disciples were misdirected, Jesus comes to them. He doesn't let them flounder around in meaningless endeavors because he is interested in their catch. Jesus is interested in what his disciples are doing. Jesus cares about his disciples doing the things that are truly necessary, things that have eternal value. Jesus cares so much that he sees to it that his disciples are given the necessary course corrections to keep them in line with the will of God.

And what about us? Does Jesus care just as much about our being on course as he did about those original disciples? You'd better believe it. Jesus is just as interested in our work for his Kingdom as he was interested in their work for his Kingdom. In other words, Jesus cares about our catch, too. And when we begin to head in the wrong direction, when we get more tied up in the affairs of the world than the affairs of God, does Jesus come to us and realign our steps? Yes he does.

Jesus left behind an instruction manual for his fishermen. That manual is the Holy Bible. In the Scriptures, we receive the necessary instructions to keep our life on God's course. Besides Holy Scripture, Jesus left behind the church. We have been left with a

place where we can come together with other fishermen to regroup and replenish our spirits. Jesus comes to us through his Word, through his church, and through his other disciples, and through his holy sacraments of baptism and communion.

As a part of Jesus' concern about his disciples catch, Jesus provides detailed instruction on how he wants things done. In our reading, Jesus told the disciples to throw the net over the right side of the boat – not the left side, the front or the back, but the right side. Why? Was there something magical about the right side? No. The point is that Jesus issued an order and the disciples did exactly what they were told. They didn't argue. They didn't question. They didn't decide they had a better idea. They did what they were told to do. The disciples responded to what Jesus said without trying to see the logic.

This is important for us to see. God doesn't ask for our approval of his commands for our lives. God doesn't care whether we can see his logic or not – and trust me, we will never be smart enough to understand God. Jesus wants us to love and trust him enough to follow him wherever he goes. Would you like some examples? Love your neighbor as yourself. How about love your enemies? Give to others without thinking of yourself. To be the first you must be the last and the servant of all. No questioning just obedience.

So, what happens if we forget our way of doing things and start doing things God's way. Let's see. At Jesus' command, the disciples threw their nets over the right side of the boat. With no time lapse recorded, the net was so full of fish the disciples couldn't pull it back on board. When the disciples obeyed without question, their efforts were rewarded far beyond their wildest dreams. The result of their obedience was literally more than they could handle. After all the energy they wasted doing things their way, success was to be had only when they did things Jesus' way.

What can we draw from that? When we are doing the things God wants and doing things God's way, our success is guaranteed. Now we always have to be careful here so people don't get into a "name it and claim it" theology. God doesn't promise us a BMW in the driveway of our million-dollar home with a few more millions in the bank. That's not success in God's economy.

Success for our labor is guaranteed when we are acting within God's will. When we are witnessing to others, there will be success. When we are loving others, there will be success. When we are trusting God with our whole heart, we will have the success of a peaceful mind and soul. Are you getting the picture? The success we will have is measured in God's economy not our economy. And that success is guaranteed – just as sure as those disciples had a net full of fish.

Now it's time to go back and pick up something I said earlier. Remember I phrased Jesus' question as: "*Children, do you have anything to eat?*" That's a very literal rendering of the Greek and it has a purpose. When you translate with a literal eye, the question fits nicely into the last part of today's reading.

When the disciples arrived at the shore with their fish, with their trophy catch of trophy fish, no one cleaned fish, built a fire, and started cooking. When the disciples arrived, Jesus was ready to feed them. On the shore, they found a charcoal fire with fish and bread already prepared. Jesus fed them with what he provided not what they provided. And notice, Jesus served them the bread and the fish.

There is a very important point in here for us. We see that the food that Jesus considers necessary for our health isn't the food that we can provide for ourselves, but the food that he provides for us. The spiritual nourishment we receive from our Savior is not only more important than our physical food, it's also eternal.

Jesus cares about all our needs. He promises to supply us with everything we need for life – and he'll do just that. But what Jesus considers most important is that we are spiritually fed. Jesus knows that our souls can only starve and die on our natural diet of sin. So his concern is that we are fed from his very hand – fed the Good News of God's grace and mercy, fed the forgiveness he bought for us on the cross, fed with the Holy Spirit of God which keeps us in the true faith.

Friends, Jesus has called us just as he called his original disciples. Like those disciples, Jesus has called us to be fishers of men. And we can answer that call with complete confidence. We can answer because we know that Jesus cares about our fishing. We can answer because we know that Jesus has given us complete instructions on how to fish. We can answer because Jesus guarantees us success in our fishing. And we can answer because we know that, while we tend to his business, Jesus will care for our every need. It is my prayer that today and every day, we will all answer our call to be fishermen for Jesus.