

The Third Sunday of Easter
April 10, 2016
Christ the Rock Lutheran Church
Farmington, NM

John 21:1-14 Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: 2 Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. 3 "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.

4 Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

5 He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?"

"No," they answered.

6 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.

7 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. 8 The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. 9 When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." 11 So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. 14 This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

"Power for God's People"

He clicked on the link Amanda had sent him, opening the online job referral questionnaire. He found the right drop down menu for how long he had known her. Clicked the boxes for reliable, honest, hard-working. Filled in the blank for her responsibilities. Found the best descriptions for character, the next for personality, then the best way to describe how she worked on a team. He worked his way through the entire online employment reference set of questions. But there, just above the button to click for submit, was space for "any additional comments." He decided he needed to deliver more than just the bare facts. He wants to add color and life and emotion to help any potential employer realize how lucky they would be to have her.

So he started typing. He described the time he was so sick he was unable to come to work for a week straight at a critical time for the company. But Amanda picked up the slack. She

didn't complain about the additional work. She didn't take advantage of his absence. She just made sure everything got done. While everyone else around the office was panicking, Amanda made sure none of the costumers could even tell anything out of the ordinary was happening.

When we open our Bibles to the last chapter of John, we get something more than just a job description for Jesus. For the previous twenty chapters, John has been building the case for Jesus. So by this point we know Jesus is the Son of God. We get glimpses of his divine power as John highlights the miraculous signs Jesus displays. He shows us the trajectory of life of Jesus might not follow everyone's expectations, but definitely follows the mission to save humanity. Jesus checks all the boxes. When he cries out "**it is finished**" at his crucifixion, he pays the price for the sins of every person who has ever lived. (John 19:30) He checks the box for conquering death when he shows himself to Mary Magdalene on Easter Sunday morning. He checks the box for victorious living when he appears later to the fearful disciples and speaks peace to them. At the end of chapter 20 John even wraps things up nicely. He recaps that Jesus did so many other astounding things, but the ones he records are to bring confidence that Jesus is the promised Messiah and those who trust in him have eternal life. (John 20:30,31)

We could all shout out a loud "amen" or exclaim "alleluia" or join in another "he is risen indeed!" But then John continues. He has additional comments to add. But it's not as if this chapter is any afterthought, something he just remembered after he finished the Jesus biography. He wants to give an example of the kind of Savior we have in Jesus. He wants to add color and detail and vividness to show God's people how truly blessed we are to have Jesus. These verses from John twenty-one show a Jesus who is patient and persistent. He is gentle and determined. He lives to empower his people to carry out his calling to them. Jesus brings power for his people.

It's impossible to know exactly what was in the minds of those disciples. When the scene opens, we find them back at the Sea of Galilee. John uses the name for the biggest Gentile city along its shores. We learn there are seven disciples there. We get five of their names. So that means you can fill in the other two with your favorite disciples. We don't know exactly what's going on with those disciples, how long they waited, what they were up to after seeing Jesus initially on Easter Sunday evening. They are back where they came from, back near their home towns from where Jesus called them.

There has to be a lot of uncomfortable waiting going on with those disciples. That's when we hear: "**I'm going out to fish,' Simon Peter told them, and they said, 'We'll go with you.'**" (John 21:3) Sometimes waiting, doing nothing can just drive you crazy. I see this when I go to visit people in the hospital. A beloved family member is in surgery. The rest of the family is out in the waiting room. They don't know how long the surgery will take. They don't know what is going on or if things are going according to plan or when they'll even find out the outcome. But they can't stop thinking about it.

So what do we do when we don't know what to do? How do we handle it when we don't have enough information to act, to take the next step? I can tell you how I typically handle

those situations. I fall back into some familiar patterns. I start to wonder if what is going on in my life has been caused by some rift in my relationship with God. Is there some box I haven't checked with God? Is there some area of personal moral character where I don't measure up? Is there something from my past that disqualifies me? Is there any area of my life of faith development in which I haven't yet reached the standard? Is my anxious waiting, my worried wondering all because God has moved me over to that stack of unqualified applicants? Ever feel that way? I don't think I'm the only one.

When we don't have answers, it gets uncomfortable. When we are feeling weak, our minds start to wander. When we are under pressure, our imaginations run wild. When we are overwhelmed with the endless possibilities and troubled by tons unanswered questions, we fall into familiar, comfortable habits. And that's what the disciples did when they launched their fishing boat out into the Sea of Tiberias.

That's why we have John chapter 21. Jesus wants us to understand there is a huge difference for handling uncertainties, the unknowns of life. And it all comes down to how we see ourselves. How we see our world with our own natural, personal limitations. We are aware of our own flaws. We are filled with fear because of all we don't know and can't understand. We sense powerlessness in the face of all the vast uncertainties of life.

And that's why Jesus appears to the disciples the way he does in John chapter 21. The disciples are out in the boat, having no success catching anything. And we learn: **"Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus."** (John 21:4) There was Jesus, standing on the shore just a short distance from his dear disciples. He was in plain sight. Yet they didn't realize what they had right there.

So Jesus helps them become aware of what they don't have so they appreciate what he gives them. He asks if they've caught anything after fishing all night. They give a short, abrupt, **"no."** (John 21:5) Maybe I'm reading too much into that one word answer. But you know when you get those one word answers a lot of times it's because the person answering is moody or upset. Just ask my wife. So Jesus tells them to try one last time and put their net on the other side of the boat. And now we get to see there's more going on than the disciples understand.

Now they get to see the power. They immediately get a huge catch of fish. They catch so many fish that they can't even pull in the net. In fact, we find out the exact number of fish turns out to be 153. But when the disciples get to Jesus on the shore, they see he's started a camp fire already. And he's already got some breakfast started on those coals. So he never really needed five of those fish much less all 153. So why did Jesus do it?

Jesus appeared to those disciples to do more than just show off. Jesus appears to the disciples while they are engaged in their customary occupation. Jesus draws their attention away from their frustrations and defeats. He needed to do more than just appear and make them aware of his presence. He makes them aware of their need. Then with his miraculous power He lets his disciples know he is there to provide.

These Sundays after Easter can be tied together with the theme: "Victory Won, Battle Raging." And as we look at these Bible lessons for each week, we see Jesus won the ultimate victory on Easter. But God keeps working in the lives of his people. God doesn't do it by giving a series of pep talks or lectures. He doesn't come hawking a line of self-help books. Jesus comes to you now with a different kind of power. Jesus comes powerfully with his appearances to give his people power for our daily battles.

Here is where I think it's as important to point out what Jesus doesn't do as what he does. Jesus doesn't lecture. Jesus doesn't scold. Jesus doesn't go on a rant about how silly the disciples have been. He doesn't take them on an extended guilt trip to show how miserably they have trusted in him. Jesus could have gotten fed up and stomped away because he's already done enough for those foolish disciples. But here is the first major takeaway from this episode. Jesus is patient and persistent. Jesus is patient with people who battle unsuccessfully with uncertainty. Jesus is persistent with people who fail to see themselves and the world through the perspective of his Easter victory.

When the disciples disembark from their boat and untangle their nets and gather around, Jesus invites them: "**Come and have breakfast.**" (John 21:12) Jesus shows up in plain sight then gets the attention of his disciples so he can give to them.

And so today we see that is the most important and most fundamental quality of faith. Faith receives. Jesus gives. When you are in that hospital waiting room or when you can't sleep or when you are so filled with pain you can't think of anything else, Jesus invites you to come to him. When you don't know what to do or how to respond or how you will handle all the pressure, Jesus gives. Jesus gives you his presence. When you are ready to fall back into familiar routines and return to what you know, Jesus turns your attention to receive his gifts.

Ever wonder why Jesus appeared to those disciples again, yet another time? John caps off this account by reminding us: "**This was not the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.**" (John 21:14) In the Bible this word "appeared" is used for something that was there all along. It is the way Jesus reveals himself as the Son of God or discloses some of his powers to his people. Jesus reveals himself for the benefit of his disciples. Jesus appears to check all the boxes for you. He checks the box for living the perfect life without any doubt or worry. Jesus checks the box of taking away every flaw and every failure in your performance for God when he experienced the crucifixion. Jesus checks the box of overcoming your fear of the unknown when he walked out of his tomb on Easter.

And here's the second major takeaway from these verses. After Jesus has checked all the boxes for you, he has something more to add. Jesus isn't just patient and persistent. Jesus comes to feed and nourish God's people. Jesus comes to comfort with his presence. Jesus blesses people for work in his kingdom. Jesus richly provides for body and soul. He feeds and cares for his servants. And Jesus gives you a picture of the glorious banquet you and I will share on the heavenly shores with all believers. Amen.