

SERMON CCI John 21: 1-14 Breakfast on the Beach

When I was in high school, my family lived in Oxnard, CA, a southern CA city right on the beach. Although my dad rarely fished except when we were camping, one time he invited us three kids to go fishing on a charter boat. We were on that boat very early in the morning and they taught us how to put bait on the hooks and toss our line out, letting it hang in the water as we gently rewound the fishing line toward us. We would spend some time in one spot long enough to catch some fish and then move to the next fishing spot. But no matter what I did, I couldn't catch a fish.

I noticed that my brother, Clark, began to catch fish so I decided to stand near him wherever he went on the boat. Surely, if he caught a fish, I would be able to catch a fish there too. All day, we circled that boat with our lines baited and out in the water. Throwing the line out and rewinding it in. Over and over. All day... I did my best to do everything they said to do but I didn't catch a single fish, not one. My brother went home very pleased with himself, and I went home empty-handed and very tired. So I identify with these 7 disciples who went fishing and caught nothing all night.

Today's scripture reading tells the story of Jesus' third appearance to his disciples after he raised from the dead. His first appearance was to Mary in the garden near the empty tomb, the second ones were when he suddenly appeared to his disciples gathered in the locked room. This time he appeared on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, which is another name for Tiberias, just in time to see some of his disciples offshore. Peter was a fisherman by trade before he chose to follow Jesus, and had decided to go fishing the evening before so 6 others joined him on the boat. Notice who they were: Thomas (who was back with the disciples again), Nathaniel from Cana, where Jesus did his first miracle at a wedding, the sons of Zebedee (James and John who were also fishermen), and two unnamed disciples.

Like me, these men had been fishing for hours and had caught nothing. A lot has been written about whether it was wrong for them to waste time fishing. After all, Jesus had breathed the Holy Spirit on them, so why weren't they busy making new disciples? Other writers see this fishing trip as simple necessity. They still needed to eat and if they caught enough to sell, all the better. Right or wrong, they had fished all night and caught nothing. Peter wouldn't be bragging about this fishing trip. It was a failure. Rather like my fishing adventure.

Early in the morning, Jesus called to them from the shore, but they didn't recognize him yet. "Didn't you catch anything?" Not "**Did** you catch anything?" but

“**Didn’t** you catch anything?” Don’t we love a person who points our failures out to us? Not being a fisherman, I wondered how Jesus could tell they hadn’t caught anything. And I learned that if they had been successful, the weight of the fish they caught would have made the boat rest lower in the water. So Jesus invited them to cast their net on the right side of the boat. We have no idea what conversation went on in the boat at that point. After all, Peter and the sons of Zebedee were experienced fishermen, they knew how to fish, and you can be sure that they had thrown their net out on the right side of the boat more than once during the long night. They didn’t need the advice of a stranger who may know as much about fishing as I do. But I imagine one of them said something like, “Hold on, I don’t like taking fishing advice from a stranger either, but what could it hurt to try what he says? We haven’t caught anything. Besides, we’re all hungry.”

And when they did what Jesus told them to do, even though it didn’t make any real sense they could see, the net quickly filled with so many fish they couldn’t haul it in. 153 large fish to be exact. If this wasn’t in the Bible I would think we had just read a phony fish story! (We caught 153 fish and they were all this big!) Why 153 fish? Not a round number like 150 or 200... 153. Scholars disagree about the meaning of 153, but they all agree that however many fish were there, it was enough to overwhelm the boat. That’s when the disciple Jesus loved recognized him as Jesus. “It is the Lord!” Only Jesus could do such an extravagant miracle for his weary disciples.

Jesus welcomed them to a breakfast of bread and fish that he already had cooking on a cozy campfire on the beach. Did Jesus bring the bread and fish with him from town that morning? Or did he miraculously make bread and fish appear? As the weary fishermen sat down around the fire eating breakfast, did they remember the two times when Jesus and they had fed the crowds of hungry people? Jesus had made the fish and bread appear those days, **but they** had been the ones who kept reaching into their baskets to hand out what Jesus was providing. Jesus didn’t feed the people alone.

One thing stood out to me as I reflected on what this story can teach us about how to live as faithful Resurrection people. Jesus asked the men to bring some of the fish they had just caught. He didn’t **need** their fish, he could create fish out of the air if he just wanted more fish. But he asked them to share their fish for the meal anyway. Why would Jesus ask for some of their fish? I think it was because when we bring what we have to God to use - our skills like fishing, or sewing, cooking, flower arranging, welcoming, music, teaching, talking, reading

scripture, the ability to pray with power, inviting people, giving financially, working with kids, fixing things, organizing, leading others to accomplish a task, the gift of helping- gifts God has already given to us, God uses them in amazing ways to nourish people, to bless people, and to call people to follow Jesus, and build his kingdom. We begin to become fishers of men rather than fishing for ourselves. We become a part of what God is doing on earth.

The vote is in for Community Church of Issaquah- 3 weeks ago, after a time of discernment, you voted to call a full-time pastor and continue to be a body of Christ here in Issaquah, you voted to continue to make a difference in Jesus' name. You could have voted to continue as you are until the money runs out or no one is left. That would have been a vote to take a spiritual reverse mortgage where someone else pays your expenses so you can have a more comfortable life until you pass away. There are times when a reverse mortgage can be a reasonable investment for people as they get older to ensure their income in retirement. But Jesus didn't call his church to be comfortable, he called his church to go fishing. So you voted instead, to say "yes," to Jesus' call to bring him your fish, bring him the gifts you have, big and small, and let him use them for the kingdom. Your yes vote was a vote to let God **use you** to make a difference in Jesus' name. It was a vote to go fishing, not for yourselves, but for people who need to hear the good news about Jesus and his love.

So what is Jesus calling you to let him use for the kingdom? What gifts will you let God use to serve, to nourish others in Jesus' name, to introduce them to the God who so dearly loves them? Someone called them your time, talents, and treasure. Going fishing as a church with a new pastor will take all three- time, talents, and treasure. It's work, but it's blessed work.

Some of you have been tired and discouraged like those 7 fishermen who worked all night for nothing. They used all their fishing knowledge and experience, they did what they had always done, and they accomplished nothing. They were tired. Sound familiar? Jesus understands being weary. But his answer to them was not, "Come to shore and I'll listen to all your struggles and discouragement. Come have some breakfast and take it easy." He told them to cast their net on the right side of the boat. And that net in Jesus' hands, became a miraculous catch of fish. Because when we give the best of what we have to Jesus, and trust his directions even when they don't seem to make any sense that we can see, Jesus can make something happen that we can't imagine.

I'm wondering whether that is the point you are at as a church right now. You've spent the night working and getting nowhere, seeing your numbers shrink and your energy deplete. When I first came, you had little hope for the future. During the discernment meetings with Doug you talked very honestly about being tired and discouraged. About whether there was a future for this church. Yet you listed all these things people here are good at. You were divided about what that future should look like. And 3 weeks ago you pulled together and voted to call a pastor and go fishing together. And last Sunday, Rob and I saw a church reinvigorated. It wasn't the first time we saw it, but we really felt it last Sunday. There was a sense of life and hope here last Sunday that was palpable. A joyfulness, a willingness and even eagerness to step up and take your place, play your part in what Jesus wants to do here. Maybe, just maybe, you've begun to cast your net on the other side.

So this morning, what time, talents and treasure do you hold in your hands that Jesus is asking, "Bring some over here and let me use them to share God's love in Issaquah?" Because your new pastor, when he or she arrives, is not the only person God is calling. You're all being called to bring your fish. Big or small, every gift is needed.

You each have an orange fish stapled to your bulletin. I invite you to carefully remove it. To go fishing together with Jesus, requires everyone to bring their gifts. There are people hungry to be fed, people who have lost hope, people who are lonely, people who are looking for a spiritual home, children who need to learn Jesus loves them, adults who need to know God loves them too. What will you bring to Jesus to use? The ushers will hand out pencils, and I invite you to pause and prayerfully consider what gifts you are willing to let God use as you go forward. Write them on your fish, use the back if needed. Be specific- music, cooking, teaching, visiting, ushering, whatever. If you have one gift to share, write it down as your commitment, if you're willing and able to bring more than one, write them down as your commitment. Sign your name, and place your fish in the offering plates as they pass. It's time to get ready to go fishing with Jesus.