

April 25, 2004

Easter 3

"Great Fishing Days with the Risen Savior"

JOHN 21:1-14

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way: ² Simon Peter, Thomas (called 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 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. 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.

I have been ocean fishing only twice in my life. We spent hours cruising back and forth in the Santa Barbara Channel as the sport fishing boat used its fish finder to look deep into the water to find schools of rock fish. Finally the captain announced over the loudspeaker, "We found a school of fish, and we will be trolling over them and when I give the signal lower your lines." Everyone began pulling in fish, except for me. My line broke, and by the time I fixed it we had passed over the school of fish and they were not able to find another school of fish with their fish finder.

Wouldn't it be great if we could purchase a special instrument that would help us find people in our community that we could bring into the kingdom of God? We would know exactly where to focus our efforts to cast out the Word of God to people and see them brought into the kingdom.

Jesus once told his disciples that he had called them to leave their fishing nets and start fishing for people. Jesus even promised that he would be with them until the end of the age when he told them to baptize people and teach them what he commanded. This morning as we watch the risen Lord and Savior guide 153 fish into the net and as we see him provide fish and bread over a hot bed of coals, we are reminded of how the Lord Jesus is with us here in this congregation. As we cast out God's Word into the lives of people, the Savior will use our humble efforts to bring people into his kingdom. And the ever

present Lord and Savior will also care for his people, feed them and nourish them, not just with food for their body but nourishment and sustenance for those days when they get discouraged and start to lose heart. This morning I want to speak to you about our future, about my future and your future with this theme, **“Great Fishing Days Ahead with Our Risen Savior.”**

1) Jesus brings the fish to the net

If we are going to let the Lord use us to bring people into his kingdom, then we need to depend more on Jesus and less on modern marketing techniques to get the job done. Cleverly designed lures and baits, and even electronic fish finders can be used to catch fish, but they have no place in the Savior’s kingdom who told his disciples, “I will make you fisher of men.”

Peter and the other disciples were waiting along the Sea of Galilee for Jesus to appear to them as he had promised. The Savior had promised them “After I have risen I will go before you into the Galilee.” (Matthew 26:32) Also the angel had told the woman to tell them disciples he was going before them into Galilee. Jesus kept his promise to them as our text tells us, “Afterward Jesus appeared to his disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, another name of the Sea of Galilee.” Jesus always keeps his promises. There are thousands of promises in the Bible, and not one of them has ever been broken. How true are the words of the Psalmist David, “I wait for the Lord and his Word I put my hope.”

Peter decided to make the most of his time while he waiting for Jesus. It was the spring of the year, the grass was green, the birds were singing, the fish were moving into the warmer waters near the shore. As the sun was setting, he decided to go fishing, which meant casting or throwing nets into the water with the hope of pulling in a few fish. They labored all night and they caught nothing. Fresh fish, baked over a bed of hot coals, if only they could catch a few before the sun began to rise in the east.

As the light begins to break over the mountains in the east, the disciples see a person walking along the shore. They are not far away, only about a hundred yards. It says that “they did not realize it was Jesus.” Jesus often looked different, even unrecognized, when he appeared to people after his resurrection. The voice calls out, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?” The answer that comes back from the disciples is very simple, “No!” Sometimes it is good not to ask an experienced fisherman if he has caught anything, especially after fishing all night.

The stranger on the shore calls across the water of the lake, “Throw your net on right side of the boat and you will find some.” Perhaps this stranger saw a ripple in the water, a fish feeding on the surface, or moving. Why not listen and give it a try. They threw out the net over the water, and what happened next had happened three years before this on the same Sea of Galilee. Jesus filled the net with fish. The water was boiling and jumping with fish trapped in the net, 153 big fish to be exact. At four or five pounds each that comes to 600 pounds of fish, over a quarter ton, trapped in a net that is small enough to be thrown out over the water. Fishing does not get any better than this.

As Yogi Berra once said, “This is de ja vu all over again.” The look on Peter’s face tells the

story. Not only does he have eyes as big as saucers because of the large catch of fish, but he realizes the stranger on the shore who told him to throw the net on the right side of the boat was none other than Jesus especially when John says, "It's the Lord." Peter does not wait to row the 100 yards to the shore. He wraps his coat around himself, perhaps around his neck, jumps in and walks towards Jesus. As the others pull on the net to bring it into the shore, the thin linen lines that typically made up the lightweight throw nets were not broken. The Lord not only brought the fish into the net, he even kept the fish from escaping and the net from breaking.

What an important lesson we can learn about life from these fish that were brought into the net. The risen Lord and Savior who sits at the right hand of God is directing the affairs of his church and taking care of his people. He is so powerful that he can take problems and turn them into blessings. He can take ordinary human words that share the message of salvation and use them to bring people into the kingdom. The risen Savior who brought a persecutor like Paul into the church also led him to confess, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes." Romans 9 says, "It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy."

Just as the fish were miraculously brought into the net, the Savior miraculously brings people into his kingdom where God's Word is brought into their lives. In Isaiah 55 the Lord tells us, "So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." 153 or 3000 or just 1. Before the end comes, if the Lord only brings one more person into his kingdom through the gospel that is shared by Christians throughout the world that would be a miracle of such great magnitude it would take our breath away. The miracle Peter saw once again on the sea of Galilee that morning with Jesus, would soon seem small by comparison to one sermon that resulted in 3000 people believing and being baptized.

If Jesus were Donald Trump, he would have told Peter, "You're fired!" Peter denied Jesus, even cursed and swore that he never knew him. Peter also went out and wept bitterly. It was Jesus who personally appeared to Peter after his resurrection. That appearance is not recorded for us, but you can almost hear Jesus comforting Peter with words of forgiveness and peace, and even showing him the nail marks in his hands. Peter and the others heard Jesus say, "Peace be to you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." Instead of hearing the words, "You're fired!" he was reminded that night, and here again on the shores of Galilee that he was not fired. In fact he was not just hired but called to fish for people using the net of God's unfailing word.

"You're fired!" That could well be the words we hear from Jesus this morning for our unfaithfulness to him, our failure to love him as we should, our failure to read the words he has given us, our failure to pray and turn to him, our days of losing sight of our mission and purpose on this earth. Instead Jesus comes to us and says "Peace be to you. Your sin is forgiven!" The words of Jesus remind us this morning that best days for fishing and bringing people may still be ahead of us in our lives.

2) Jesus fed the hungry fishermen

As the disciples come to the shore a most pleasant sight greets their eyes. "When they landed they saw a fire of burning coals here with fish on it and some bread." Jesus was there. He invited them, "Come and have breakfast." Working all night. Hungry. The morning light is breaking in the east. The fresh fish are baking on the fire, and there fresh bread. It does not get better than this. Reminds me of a time when I was in Glacier National Park, Two Medicine Lake, the sun was setting, the trout were biting. My friend Al calls across the lake, "Do you have any fish?" I called back, "Al, get the pan ready." Fresh trout. Fresh French bread. Glacier National Park. Two Medicine Lake. That was nothing compared to the meal that the disciples had with Jesus. The Lord would miraculously provide them with this special meal would also sustain them throughout their lives.

The 23rd Psalm says that our shepherd supplies all our needs. "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies and my cup runneth over. As we sing in the resurrection hymn, "I Know that My Redeemer Lives": "He lives to grant me rich supply, He lives to guide me with his eye, He lives my hungry soul to feed. He lives to help in time of need." As someone once said, "We're just hungry beggars telling other hungry beggars about the word of life."

Holding out the word of life to people in our community will not be an easy task for us. Every day the Lord will feed us and support us and encourage us as he did his disciples.

Peter told the other disciples. "I am going fishing!" The sun is setting in the west. The grass is green. The flowers are blooming. The fish are in the shallows. And Jesus is standing on the shore with meal for us. It does not get any better than this. Amen.