

April 18, 2010
Easter 3

"Fishing with the Risen Lord"

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." ⁴ So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. ⁵ Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. ⁶ He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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. ⁹ The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. ¹⁰ When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. ¹¹ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." ¹² Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, ¹³ but even with so many the net was not torn. ¹⁴ Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. ¹⁵ Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁶ This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Fishing was good in the spring of the year on the river that ran through our family farm. It was then that we tried to catch the tasty walleye pike. We cast our lures into the pool behind the big rock, or off the rock pier or the point near the woods. I still remember that day in late May when I was ten years old and proudly showed my mother the nice fish I caught for supper that night.

How different it was for Jesus' disciples that day in spring when they fished all night on the Sea of Galilee and caught nothing. But then Jesus came to them, disguised as a stranger, and told them to throw their nets on the right side of the boat. Suddenly the net was exploding with fish, large fish, 153 large fish to be exact.

Jesus used the picture of fishing with a net to describe how the Word of God goes out into the world. In Matthew 13 he said, "The kingdom of God is like a net that is let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish." Instead of luring people into the kingdom of God, the church lets out the Word of God and trusts Jesus to bring people into the net.

This morning we want to do some fishing with Jesus our Risen Lord and Savior. We want him to show us how he brings the fish into the net and how he feeds the people who do the fishing.

Jesus brings people into the net

Peter and the other disciples went to Galilee to wait for Jesus to come to them just as he told them he would do. How different Galilee was for them compared to what they had seen happen in Jerusalem when Jesus was nailed to the cross for our sin. Peter looks across the Sea of Galilee as the sun is setting and tells the other disciples who were with him, "I am going out to fish." A nice meal of fish would sure taste good, and maybe even provide a little extra money to buy food and other necessities. We are told that they worked all night casting nets into the lake and they caught nothing. Have you ever come back from a fishing trip with nothing to show for your efforts? I remember seeing a bumper sticker that read, "A bad day of fishing is still better than a good day at work."

Now it is morning. The sun is starting to rise in the east. Jesus is standing on the shore, but the disciples do not realize it was Jesus. Jesus looked different at first when he appeared to people after his resurrection. The disciples on the way to Emmaus did not realize it was Jesus talking to them along the way. This stranger on the shore calls out to them across the water, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" The word used here for friends can also be translated as "children." We might say, "Boys, do you have any fish?" Spanish speakers would say, "Amigos." Jesus tells them to throw the net on right side of the boat and he tells them they will find fish. Has this stranger seen ripples in the water that they have not seen?

They threw out their net on the right side of the boat. "When they did they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish." When John saw this is, it was deja vu all over again. Three years before he had seen the net jumping with fish when they followed Jesus' command to let down the nets in deep water. Joyfully he says to Peter, "It is the Lord." Peter wastes no time wrapping his outer garments around him, most likely around his shoulders, and jumps into the shallow water to be with Jesus. He helps them drag the net ashore. It is full of fish, 153 large fish. When you get a big one you want to measure it and even weigh it. There were 153 large fish, and each one was miraculously brought into the net by Jesus.

Shortly after this Peter would see an even greater miracle on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit would give him the strength to boldly preach about Jesus and his resurrection. That day the net of God's Word miraculously brought 3000 people into the kingdom of God. As John said, "It's the Lord." It's the Lord who brought in the fish, and the Lord who brought people into his church at Pentecost, and the Lord who still brings people into his church today, sometimes in large numbers and sometimes in small numbers.

We heard about Saul in our first reading for this morning. It is the Lord who took the Saul the fanatical and violent persecutor of the church and led him to believe and trust in Jesus for his salvation. Don't you see Saul traveling on the road from Jerusalem to Damascus? Don't you see the fire and determination and blood in his eyes as he plans how he will get information on Christians in Damascus and drag them back to Jerusalem to be punished and put to death? Do you not see him drag mothers and dads from their children, beat them and tie them up as their children are screaming, "Mommy and Daddy?" The man with blood in his eyes suddenly hears a voice from heaven saying, "Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me." He knows this is the voice of the Lord as he calls out, "Lord who are you?" And the voice that comes back says, "I am Jesus." Miraculously Jesus brought this

violent persecutor of the church into his kingdom and he became a chosen instrument to bring the message of God's love in Jesus to Jews and Gentiles all over the Roman world.

It is the Lord who is blessing the message of his Word in these last days and bringing people into his church. Where would you be this morning if it were not for God's amazing grace and the miracle of bringing you from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light? Ephesians 2 tells me of the violent enemy of God I was as I was born into this world. "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the air...All of us lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature." Then it goes on to say that we were "objects of wrath." My sins against a holy, perfect, pure and infinite God demand a punishment that is infinite. By a miracle God removed my sin that cries out for his punishment by placing it all on Jesus. By a miracle he brings us to this place and this time and this spot where we believe with all our hearts that the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin.

This miracle of bringing people into the kingdom is happening all over the world, sometimes in large numbers, most often just one by one. Jesus made it clear, so clear, on how we are to fish for people. "Go and preach the gospel to every creature..." "Be my witnesses..." Make disciples of all nations by baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and then teaching them all things. Jesus has not asked us to dig in our tackle boxes and bring out fancy lures, and perfectly tied flies, or worms hung on sharp hooks to lure people into the kingdom of God. He has not asked to supplement bringing the word of God to people with fancy gimmicks from the world of modern advertising and marketing. Let people know how lost they are without Jesus. Show them the nail prints in his hands and the Lord Jesus will bring people into his church. The Lord will bring people into his kingdom. Jesus told us that until the end of time the gospel will be proclaimed and it will produce results in the lives of people as he has determined.

The Savior who brought the fish into the net is also the Savior who fed the fishermen who had worked hard all night.

He feeds the fishermen

The disciples come to the shore. Jesus was waiting for them. It says that they saw a fire with burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus had miraculously provided for them with fish and bread baking on the coals along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus did not have to go to the store to buy flour to bake bread. He did not have to gather the sticks to start the fire as we might do for a Santa Maria style BBQ. He miraculously provided them with food to eat just as he fed 5000 people with only five barley loaves and two small fish. And then Jesus invites them to sit down with him and enjoy the breakfast he prepared. "Come and have breakfast." 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.

Jesus also provided you with your breakfast this morning. Perhaps you use the prayer, "Come Lord Jesus, be our guest and let these gifts to us be blest." In Psalm 104 we are told that the Lord provides the grass to feed the cattle. "He makes the grass grow for the cattle and plants of man to cultivate to bring forth fruit food from the earth." Then it goes

on to tell us, "These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time. It is the Lord who provides the food for the disciple to eat and the Lord who provides us with our daily bread.

As we see Jesus provide food for the fishermen who were hungry after a long night of fishing, we also think of how Jesus provides something special for us in these last days as we struggle to bring God's Word to people. It is the Lord who sustains us and strengthens. He is the Shepherd who feeds his sheep. "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures and leadeth me beside the still waters." Think of how many special meals your Risen Lord is preparing for you. He already has planned the times in your life when he will strengthen you from his Word as he shows you how much he cares for you and loves you. As we sing in the 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."

The sun is setting in the west. The grass is green. Spring is in the air. It is a good time to go fishing, a good time to let down the net of God's Word, and a good time to stand in awe as Jesus miraculously brings people into his kingdom. Amen.