

Friends, Food, Fellowship

Lesson for April 16, 2023

Unit II: Experiencing the Resurrection

Scriptural Background: John 21:1-14

Printed Text: John 21:1-14

Key verse: *“Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord.”* (John 21:12, NIV)

Jesus used “fishing” as an example of His KINGDOM Power to save and provide from the beginning of His ministry. The “Ichthus” is the Greek Word for “fish” but became the “sign of the fish” used by early Christians as a secret Christian identifying symbol and now known also as the “Jesus fish.”

According to tradition, ancient Christians, during their persecution by the Roman Empire in the first few centuries after Christ, used the fish symbol to mark meeting places and tombs, or to distinguish friends from foes. According to one ancient story, when a Christian met a stranger in the road, the Christian sometimes drew one arc of the simple fish outline in the dirt. If the stranger drew the other arc, both believers knew they were in good faithFULL company.

In this week’s lesson, the disciples find themselves in faithFULL company with Jesus sharing His presence, His love, and His fellowship.

Key Terms

1. **Cast** (verse 6) – To toss, throw out, put, place; throw.
2. **Disciples** (verse 2) – Learners, pupils: followers of Christ.
3. **Dragging** (verse 8) – To draw, sweep away; “towing” (NIV).
4. **Fish(ing)** (verse 3) – To go fishing; be a fisher.
5. **Multitude** (verse 6) – A great number; a crowd, bundle; assemblage; “large number” (NIV).
6. **Revealed** (verse 1) – Made visible, clear; made known; displayed; “shewed” (KJV); “appeared” (NIV).

Lesson Background

Today’s text is the first part of an extended narrative detailing one of Jesus’ appearances following his resurrection, an account recorded only by John. John has already recounted events from the day of the resurrection itself. Mary Magdalene, finding Jesus’ tomb empty, told Simon Peter and “the other disciple” that Jesus’ body had been taken. The two rushed to the tomb to see for themselves (20:3-10). Then Jesus appeared to Mary, confirming that he was indeed raised from the dead (20:11-18).

Later that same day, the “first day of the week,” Jesus appeared to his disciples in a locked room. He appeared to them again a week later, that time addressing Thomas, who had been absent before. That man needed and received personal, tangible evidence that Jesus really was alive (20:24-28).

The appearance to Thomas is, in certain ways, the climax of John’s Gospel in light of Jesus’ statement, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”. John then immediately informs us of the “many other signs” (miracles) that Jesus performed (20:30). These comprise the fabric of this Gospel. Understanding the meaning of these signs, readers can put their faith in the risen Jesus whom they have not seen (20:31).

We come to the final post-resurrection appearance of Jesus that is recorded in the Gospel of John. The general description afterward refers to the unspecified amount of time between the previous appearances in and near Jerusalem and the one that takes place by the Sea of Galilee. This body of water, also known as the Sea of Tiberias and the Lake of Gennesaret, is a large freshwater lake of about 64 square miles. It is the dominant feature of the region where Jesus grew up and conducted much of his ministry.

At the beginning of John 21, it may well have been a sense of anti-climax which prompted Peter to decide he was going fishing. Certainly, he’d experienced the excitement of Resurrection Sunday, he had seen the risen Lord, but where was all that excitement leading? Jesus himself had disappeared as suddenly and mysteriously as he had appeared. Peter and the other disciples may well have had a feeling of being left in the lurch. With Peter in particular, there may have been a sense of unfinished business, of reconciliation as yet unmade, after the awful matter of denying Jesus. What were the disciples meant to do now? For three years they had been Jesus’ near-constant companions. Now there was a gaping hole in their lives, and they were left wondering how to fill it.

Peter, always a man who liked practical action, comes up with a very obvious solution: back to work. Back to the practice and the trade he and the others knew so well, that of fishing.

Lesson In Depth

I. Toiling in Vain (John 21:1-6)

After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples: John recorded another of the several appearances of the resurrected Jesus to His disciples. This appearance took place in the Galilee region (at the Sea of Tiberias). Matthew 28:16 also records an appearance of the resurrected Jesus to His disciples in Galilee.

Simon Peter: Once again Peter was at the top of a list of the disciples. This time he was among seven who joined him in fishing at the Sea of Galilee. Peter, James, and John had previously been fishermen. It appears the disciples were just waiting for Jesus to tell them what to do.

I am going fishing: Some believe that Peter was wrong to go fishing, and that this was a compromised return to a former occupation. Others believe Peter disobeyed no command of Jesus and was simply wise and practical. In the end, only the attitude of Peter's heart could determine if he was disobedient in going back to fishing. It is important to remember that they went to Galilee because Jesus told them to (Matthew 28:7, 28:10).

That night they caught nothing: They fished through the night and had no success. Whether their motives were good or bad, **that night they caught nothing.**

“All night they had toiled without one sign of fish; they had lost heart; they were weary, hungry, hopeless.” (Morrison)

“To be a fisherman, a man must expect disappointments; he must often cast in the net and bring up nothing but weeds. The minister of Christ must reckon upon being disappointed; and he must not be weary in well-doing for all his disappointments, but must in faith continue in prayer and labor, expecting that at the end he shall receive his reward.” (Spurgeon)

But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: The previous three resurrection appearances in John's Gospel were each *unexpected*. This also seemed to be unexpected; the **disciples did not know that it was Jesus.**

Children, have you any food: Jesus spoke to His disciples with a common greeting that working men used amongst themselves. Yet He also made them explain an unsuccessful night of fishing, causing them to answer Him **no.**

Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some: Jesus made a strange suggestion to His disciples. There was no logical reason why fishing in the morning light would be better than fishing at night. There was no reason why fishing on one side of the boat would be better than the other side. It wasn't even directly a test of trust in Jesus, because they did not know it was Him until the fish were caught. This was probably a test of their ability to find the guidance of God in small and unsuspected ways – such as a stranger calling out fishing instructions from the shore.

“I have been unable to find any evidence which indicates which side of the boat was normally used by fishermen on the sea of Galilee so that it is difficult to know whether this was unusual or not.” (Morris)

This account illustrates the principle that we should never be afraid to change our method, as long as it is at the direction of Jesus.

They were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of the fish: The disciples did as the Man on the shore asked and were successful beyond expectation. This shows a difference between doing work without Divine guidance and with Divine guidance.

The experience must have reminded the disciples of a similar incident many months before, though on that occasion the net was broken, and the boat began to sink (see Luke 5:1-11).

“There is no need to seek symbolical meanings for the right and left side. The difference is not between right and left, but between working with and without Divine guidance.” (Plummer)

We have even greater reason to expect blessing as He directs our service. Jesus never commanded these disciples to go fishing, but He commanded us to preach the Gospel and make disciples.

“Christ’s presence, if He would but come among us in the fullness of His strength, would do so much more for us than anything that we have ever seen yet that we should be as much astounded by the increase as the apostles were by the two great draughts of fishes. Christ had but to will it, and the fish came swimming in shoals to the net, and he has but to will it, and souls will be converted by millions to himself and his gospel.” (Spurgeon)

“Perhaps, if they had not fished at night, Christ would not, have given them fish in the daytime. He does not often come to bless idlers; He acts sovereignly, as I have said, but He generally gives His blessing to those churches that do the most for Him.” (Spurgeon)

II. A Renewed Fellowship (John 21:7-14)

Therefore, that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord: John immediately recognized that the stranger was the risen Lord, for only He had such supernatural knowledge and power (verse 6). John reached the tomb before Peter (John 20:4) and recognized the fact of Jesus’ resurrection before Peter (John 20:8). Here John also recognized the identity of the stranger on the shore before Peter did. John knew that anything this wonderful had to come from Jesus.

Plunged into the sea: John was first in recognition, but Peter would be first in devotion. He threw on his outer garment and threw himself into the water to reach Jesus as soon as possible. The boat couldn’t move quickly enough for Peter, and he didn’t want John to be first again. Perhaps – perhaps – Peter thought he might walk on the water to the shore.

And the other disciples came in a little ship: The “little ship” is a small skiff attached to the main fishing vessel.

Dragging the net with fish: The other disciples followed, doing the hard work of bringing their net full of fish with them.

As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread: Apparently, the Lord created this breakfast as He had created food for the multitudes (6:1-13).

We see here Jesus Christ the Savior of the world providing for the needs of these He has called. This is a simple meal, but sufficient to take care of their needs. Jesus has set a table before each of us; it is therefore our obligation to eat of that table.

Bring some of the fish which you have just caught: The order of events shows that Jesus *had food for them* before the great catch of fish were brought in. What they caught *added* to the menu; it did not make it.

Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land: “One hundred and fifty-three fish plus a wet net would probably weigh as much as three hundred pounds, or more. John’s recording of the precise number reinforces the fact that he was an eyewitness author of the events he recorded (1 John 1:1-4). Jesus’ action here in providing the fish also indicated that He would still provide for his disciples needs (Philippians 4:19; Matthew 6:25-33).

Full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three: Peter took the initiative and dragged the heavy net all by himself. The **net was not broken** and held a large catch of 153 fish. Through the centuries there have been many attempts to explain why the number was 153. The truth is that all we know for certain is that 153 represents *the number of fish in the net*. The many allegorical interpretations of the number warn us against creating hidden meanings in the Biblical text.

Jesus said to them, “Come and eat breakfast”: We are again impressed at the servant nature of Jesus, even in His resurrection. He prepared breakfast for His disciples, no doubt a delicious one.

Boice reflected on the many invitations of Jesus in the Gospels.

- Come and see (John 1:39).
- Come and learn (Matthew 11:28-29).
- Come and rest (Mark 6:31).
- Come and dine (John 21:12).
- Come and inherit (Matthew 25:34-36).

This invitation that Jesus gives these disciples is open today, Come and dine.

Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, “Who are You?”; knowing that it was the Lord: Notice here, that His disciples did not recognize Jesus from His outward appearance, but they knew Him when He spoke to them. They knew it was their Lord. This is another indication that there was something unusual about the appearance of Jesus after His resurrection. This tells us that what is inside is much more important than the outward appearance. He has changed to the eyes, but He is the same Lord. When we look at Jesus with our physical eyes, we do not recognize Him for who He is. When He moves upon our heart and we see Him in the Spirit, He is very clear to us.

Jesus then came and took the bread: Jesus is often seen eating with His disciples after His resurrection. This is a picture of intimate, friendly fellowship.

Gave it to them, and likewise the fish: “Evidently there was something solemn and significant in His manner, indicating that they were to consider Him as the Person who supplied all their wants.” (Dods)

“They ate the bread and fish that morning, I doubt not, in silent self-humiliation. Peter looked with tears in his eyes at that fire of coals, remembering how he stood and warmed himself when he denied his Master. Thomas stood there, wondering that he should have dared to ask such proofs of a fact most clear. All of them felt that they could shrink into nothing in his divine presence, since they had behaved so ill.” (Spurgeon)

Jesus feeds the hungry every time. We should feed upon His Word, and we will be filled. “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6).

This is now the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples: This is a third appearance to the disciples, although there have been appearances to other people. “The third time”, the reference to the “third time” refers only to the appearances reported in John’s Gospel, i.e., the first being (in 20:19-23; the second in 20:26-29).

Lesson Summary

Today’s lesson reveals five qualifications that we must have to serve Christ effectively:

1. To serve Christ effectively, you must have trusted in Him as your risen Savior and Lord.

The foundation for chapter 21 is chapter 20, where Thomas and the other disciples came to full faith in the risen Lord. I include this point because invariably there are people in evangelical churches who come regularly and even serve in some capacity, but they have never been born again. They would profess that they believe in Jesus, but they never have trusted in Him personally to forgive their sins and give them eternal life.

2. To serve Christ effectively, realize your insufficiency and Christ’s all-sufficiency.

The disciples were experienced professional fishermen, but we read (John 21:3b-5), “... that night they caught nothing. But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. So Jesus said to them, ‘Children, you do not have any fish, do you?’ They answered Him, ‘No.’” Their one-word answer may reflect their frustration: “No.” Whenever you read that Jesus asked a question, you need to understand that He wasn’t looking for information. He knew that they had not caught anything, but He wanted them to recognize and acknowledge their insufficiency.

Andreas Kostenberger (*John* [Baker], p. 590) observes, “Remarkably, the disciples never catch a fish in any of the Gospels without Jesus’ help.” Jesus wanted to remind the disciples of what He said in the upper room in the context of bearing fruit for His kingdom (John 15:5), “Apart from Me you can do nothing.” In the Greek text, “nothing” means “nothing”! The fact is, we only trust in Christ to the extent that we recognize our own insufficiency, as well as His all-sufficiency.

3. To serve Christ effectively, obey His commands.

Granted, the disciples did not yet know that it was the Lord. John doesn’t explain why these tired, seasoned fishermen would have obeyed some stranger giving advice from the shore. But his point in telling the story is to show that if you do what Jesus commands, He will give the blessing. Also, I’m sure that their experience reminded them of that night on the front end of

Jesus' ministry, when He told Peter to put out into the deep water and let down their nets for a catch. But Peter protested (Luke 5:5), "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets." When Peter obeyed, the Lord almost sank their boat with the miraculous catch of fish.

This post-resurrection repetition of the miracle would have refreshed their memories of that first catch of fish and reminded them that people, not fish, was now to be their focus. In that first miraculous catch, Jesus was in the boat with the disciples, picturing His presence with them when He came into this world. Now, He is on the shore, picturing Him in heaven as He directs and provides as they fish for men. But on both occasions, the abundant catch came when they obeyed the simple command of Jesus.

4. To serve Christ effectively, be eager for fellowship with Christ.

The disciple whom Jesus loved (John) first recognized the Lord, but it was Peter who couldn't wait for them to row to shore, but jumped in the water to get to Jesus. It's significant that Peter did this in spite of his recent failure in denying the Lord. The Lord had met privately with Peter on resurrection day (Luke 24:35) to restore him in his relationship with Him. But sometimes we allow previous failures to keep us from wanting to be with the Lord, even after He has assured us of forgiveness. We think that we need to do penance or feel guilty for a while before we come back to Him. But grace means that we must accept His forgiveness freely. Grace doesn't lead us to sin more, but to sin less. A person who has experienced God's grace will have an impact on others.

Jesus' invitation to the disciples to come and have breakfast is His standing invitation to all of His people: "Come, dine with Me." Fellowship with the Lord is necessary if you want to serve Him effectively.

5. To serve Christ effectively, first let Him minister to you.

Jesus already had some fish prepared on the charcoal fire, but then He took some of the fish that He had just provided for them, cooked them, and served them breakfast. By the way, although some commentators come up with some fanciful allegorical significance to the 153 fish they caught, it's probably just an eyewitness account that shows that John wasn't making up this story. Like all fishermen, they counted the fish. (bible.org)