

John 21:1-14

After this, Jesus showed himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. This is how he showed himself: ²Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ³Simon Peter said to them, “I’m going fishing.”

They replied, “We’ll go with you.”

They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. ⁴Early in the morning, Jesus was standing on the shore, but the disciples did not know it was Jesus.

⁵Jesus called to them, “Boys, don’t you have any fish?”

“No!” they answered.

⁶He told them, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” So they cast the net out. Then they were not able to haul it in because of the large number of fish.

⁷The disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard, “It is the Lord!” he tied his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the sea.

⁸But the other disciples came in the little boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about one hundred yards. ⁹When they stepped out on land, they saw some bread and a charcoal fire with fish on it. ¹⁰Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you just caught.”

¹¹So Simon Peter climbed aboard and hauled the net to land, full of large fish, 153 of them. Yet even with so many, the net was not torn.

¹²Jesus said to them, “Come, eat breakfast.”

None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” because they knew it was the Lord.

¹³Jesus came, took the bread, and gave it to them, and also the fish. ¹⁴This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Gone Fishing

I.

It was a tumultuous time for the disciples. They had been in the upper room behind locked doors—twice. Jesus had come among them to bring them the peace of knowing and understanding that he was risen from the dead. Still, though, the disciples didn’t really know what to do with themselves. Jesus was risen, sure, but he wasn’t with them like he had been before. They had relied on him to give all the direction for life for the past three years of their instruction. Now what? What were they to do with themselves? What was to be the course of action for them?

Peter thought *he* had it figured out. It was time to go back to what he actually understood and knew quite well how to do. “I’m going fishing” (John 21:3, EHV), he said.

For Peter the tumult had been deeper than perhaps that of any other disciple. *He* was the one who had confidently proclaimed that he would *never* leave Jesus’ side. *He* had stated unequivocally that he would *never* deny Jesus. But he did. Three times he denied he ever knew his Savior, just as Jesus had predicted. The guilt was intense. Going fishing offered a return to normalcy. Here was something he knew and understood. Here was something at which Peter could excel.

All the others who were with him that day thought this sounded like a splendid idea. “They replied, ‘We’ll go with you’” (John 21:3, EHV).

No amateur anglers were these men, merely out for some relaxing lark on their day off. They were professional commercial fishermen. Just three years before this had been the way they made their living. They knew exactly how to go about it—what the right times were, where the best spots ought to be, what equipment to use in every weather condition and circumstance imaginable. Their livelihood had once depended on their knowledge and skill.

II.

We’ve all experienced tumultuous times of one sort or another. Perhaps today’s confirmands feel as though they have just come through tumultuous times. All their recitations had to be completed before Confirmation Day. It seemed like the pastor in his personal examination of the

students before the Examination Day service was endlessly asking questions. He *said* it was to ascertain that they did, indeed, learn the material that was their course of study for the last two years. Besides the pressures that go along with Confirmation Day there were all the regular details of life and school.

At the end of all the tumult there's a sense of relief. "Whew! I can breathe again."

Tumult hadn't ended yet for the disciples. Sure, Jesus had offered them peace in the upper room, not once, but twice. Sure, several of their number had seen him multiple times by the time of this fishing expedition. But nerves were still raw. Peter's guilt was still intense. None of them had figured out what Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection meant for them and their daily lives yet. The events of the past few weeks were still a blur and a whirlwind.

Again, we can understand. Everyone has periods of life in which nothing seems to go according to plan and where every venture seems fraught with uncertainty. We have the same desire for normalcy Peter and his companions felt.

"They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing" (John 21:3, EHV). Their venture had probably started with a great sigh of relief. While they hadn't been out on the water doing any serious fishing for a while, everything must have felt right. The tiller held in sure hands provided direction like they hadn't felt in weeks. Oars and ropes and nets in hands that automatically knew exactly what to do with them at exactly the proper time. But if *this* was a return to normalcy, it was a disaster. Despite all their knowledge, they hadn't just had a poor night, it had been a complete bust. This was *not* the way things were supposed to go for seasoned professionals out on the open water practicing their craft.

Peter and the others were trying to get on with their lives in this world after Jesus' resurrection. They were still trying to do it *without* Jesus. Their failure to catch any fish is a picture of life without Jesus.

Your life can be filled with seeming normalcy. You, today's Confirmands, stand at the brink of a new chapter in your lives. Don't be like Peter and the others and try to get on with your life without Jesus. You can find yourself choosing a career path, or a date, or a spouse, without considering God's will. You can chase good times and toys and all sorts of things of this world with great eagerness, and seem to have a successful life and be quite happy and satisfied.

But life without Jesus will be like Peter's empty fishing net.

III.

"Early in the morning, Jesus was standing on the shore, but the disciples did not know it was Jesus. ⁵Jesus called to them, 'Boys, don't you have any fish?'" (John 21:4, EHV).

The translation given by the Evangelical Heritage Version here is far more descriptive than many other translations where Jesus calls them "friends." "Boys" is not a demeaning term, but a term of endearment. It is a term used by a spiritual Father to his spiritual children. Jesus' phrase might even have given them a clue as to who it was who was speaking to them, but they didn't realize it, yet.

Jesus' instructions went against all their fishing knowledge. It was the wrong time, the wrong place, and the evidence of the completely fruitless night showed definitively that it was even the wrong day. Still, they threw out their net one last time at his direction, despite not recognizing him yet.

"The disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' When Simon Peter heard, 'It is the Lord!' he tied his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the sea" (John 21:7, EHV). The unbelievable haul of fish made John take a second look at the stranger on the shoreline. As soon as he looked, he told Peter who it was he saw. Ever impetuous, Peter jumped into the water and headed off to see Jesus as quickly as he could.

Jesus comes and reminds us of his goodness and his peace again and again. He had visited with Peter alone on Easter Sunday in a meeting so private no details were given in any of the gospels

except that Jesus had appeared to him. Later Easter Sunday evening was the time when 10 of the disciples were behind the locked doors. Peter was one of them and heard Jesus say: “Peace be with you!” (John 20:19, EHV). He heard it again a week later when Thomas was with all of them in the locked room. But his guilt and his remorse were so deep he hadn’t yet been reassured.

After this day’s haul of fish had been dragged ashore, “Jesus said to them, ‘Come, eat breakfast.’ None of the disciples dared ask him, ‘Who are you?’ because they knew it was the Lord” (John 21:12, EHV). John had recognized Jesus by his actions—by the miraculous catch of fish. Few words needed to be spoken by Jesus or any of the others for all to know what was going on.

“Jesus came, took the bread, and gave it to them, and also the fish. ¹⁴This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead” (John 21:13-14, EHV). This scene takes us back to the room where Jesus celebrated the Passover with these same men, but there is a difference. Not a word is spoken by Jesus. He doesn’t give the customary blessing over the meal. Actions speak louder than words. No blessing is needed. Jesus *is* the blessing. Jesus *is* the Messiah that had been promised. He had done everything necessary to complete the Father’s plan.

This whole meal restored Peter and the others to their call as his disciples. He invited them to come, renewing his first call to them. Though they had broken fellowship and faithfulness with him as they abandoned him to his passion, he now restores them to their former place beside him as his followers. Their supposed return to normalcy by getting on a fishing boat was no return to normalcy at all. The *real* return to normalcy was a return to Jesus and his teachings—a return to recognizing him as the Messiah they *thought* they lost when he hung on the cross. Their *real* return to normalcy was being restored to being fishers of men.

IV.

Dear Confirmands, some years ago you were baptized into the family of God. *That* is your normalcy. Today you are being confirmed into that normalcy. The Lord Jesus has called you to be his own dear children. He addresses you as a spiritual Father, “boys, girls, keep on following me.”

In your confirmation vows you are renewing the covenant made with you in baptism. God the Holy Spirit gave you faith. You have been instructed in that faith. You have studied and learned the things that have been “...written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31, EHV).

Keep looking to the Savior God whose love and salvation you have learned to know and have believed. Let Peter’s denials of Jesus and the many failings of the great heroes of the faith recorded in the Bible serve as a warning to you to continue to carefully follow the path the Lord has laid out for you. Don’t try to go through life without Jesus, but use the Word he has given you to guide and direct your life now and into the future.

And when tumult comes again, as it inevitably will, look to your Lord Jesus to be the anchor of your faith, and the rock of your salvation. Look to him to guide you through that tumult and bring you safely through, all the way until he finally calls you home to heaven.

Think about Peter. He was embarrassed of Jesus. He was slow to admit he was a disciple of Jesus. He was afraid of being labeled one of those who were closely associated with Jesus. Think of the other disciples. They had been slow to understand and slow to believe that he was risen. They had been filled with doubts. There may be times in your life ahead when your actions and attitudes mirror those of these simple fishermen. Remember always that the Lord Jesus is *never* embarrassed of those he calls his disciples. He will call to you again and again, as he did to Peter and Thomas and the others. Turn and believe, again and again through everything in life, for he has restored your fellowship with him.

Now and always remember how vital it is to be his disciple. Don’t just go out on a boat fishing, but go fishing for souls for your Lord Jesus. Amen.