

## Sermon Series: *The Gospel of John*

# Do You Have Any Fish?

John 21:1-14, (ESV)

### Jesus Appears to Seven Disciples

After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. <sup>2</sup> Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. <sup>3</sup> Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

<sup>4</sup> Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup> Jesus said to them, "**Children, do you have any fish?**" They answered him, "No." <sup>6</sup> He said to them, "**Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.**" So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. <sup>7</sup> That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. <sup>8</sup> The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.

<sup>9</sup> When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, "**Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.**" <sup>11</sup> So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn. <sup>12</sup> Jesus said to them, "**Come and have breakfast.**" Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup> Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. <sup>14</sup> This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

## Leading

sermon series

John - insert

Summer - what does the Bible say about ... I've never heard a sermon on ....

SS Alpha - on time 40-45 min, discussion at end

## Introduction: The Third Revelation of Jesus (v.1)

This portion of the text (Jn 21:1-14) breaks easily into one unit because it both begins (v.1) and ends (v.14) with the language of 'revelation.' In both verses John points out that Jesus has 'revealed' himself. This sermon could easily be entitled "The Third Revelation of Jesus," since in v.14 John reports that this episode is the "third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead."

The first time Jesus revealed himself to the disciples was the evening of his resurrection, albeit without Thomas (Jn 19:19). The second time had been a week later (Jn 19:26) with Thomas present. The point of John noting that this is the third time Jesus revealed himself is to demonstrate that Jesus has now provided abundant confirmation that he has overpowered death itself and risen to eternal life. Jesus is messiah and he has risen from the dead.

## The Time of the Revelation (v.1)

John does not explain precisely when this took place, saying only that it happened "after this," which, given a few days for travel from Jerusalem to Galilee, would place this event at least two weeks after Jesus' resurrection.

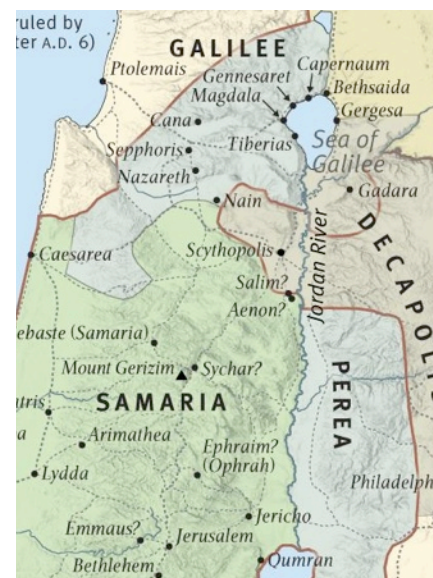
## The Place of the Revelation (v.1)

We are told in 21:1 that Jesus revealed himself to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, which is the name John uses for the Sea of Galilee. After all the celebrations of Passover were completed, they had departed Jerusalem and returned north to their hometown of Galilee.

## The Seven Disciples Involved (v.2)

John then goes on to name the disciples who were present when Jesus chose to reveal himself. He names seven; Peter, Thomas (who was a twin), Nathanael<sup>1</sup>, the two sons of Zebedee (who we know from the Synoptics are James and John), and two other unnamed disciples. One wonders if they were not Andrew, Peter's brother, and Philip.

They've now come full circle. They are back in Galilee where their walk with Jesus began. It was while fishing in the Sea of Galilee that Jesus first met and called Peter (and Andrew, his brother) to follow him (Mt 4:18-19). At the beginning of his ministry Jesus first revealed himself to his disciples beside the Sea of Galilee and now here at the end of his ministry he will reveal himself to his disciples once again, but



Sea of Galilee

<sup>1</sup> This is the first mention of Nathanael since chapter 1 and the first we learn that he was from Cana, location of Jesus' first miracle.

this time after having defeated death itself! They have been on a long journey with Jesus and have now come back home. They have now returned to where it all began—beside the Sea of Galilee.

## I'm Going Fishing

At some point, Peter says, "I am going fishing" (v.3) and all six of the others answer, "We will go with you." They then go out and get in *the* boat and fish all night.

### Peter's Boat?

Some commentators think the boat may have been Peter's boat given the use of the definite article in the Greek. They did not get into a boat, they got into **the** boat. "The presence of the definite article "the" (to) with "boat" (*plouion*) suggests that the boat was Peter's."<sup>2</sup>

### The Jesus Boat

Interestingly, in 1986 there were drought conditions around the Sea of Galilee and as the water receded the hull of a sunken boat was revealed. The boat has now been dated to the first century A.D. and thus it has become known as the "Jesus boat." This find is significant since it gives us an idea of the typical vessels used by first-century Galilean fisherman.

The boat is about 26 feet long and 8 feet wide with a single mast in the center of the boat. It would seat about 15 men. The hull was able to be safely removed from the mud and is housed in the Yigal Allon Museum in Kibbutz Ginosar in Israel.



### All In, All Night, But No Fish (v.3)

So these seven disciples **all together** got into "the" boat. They fished all night and caught nothing—not one fish. Fishing for 10 or 12 hours and catching absolutely nothing is extraordinary. Can you imagine their frustration? Some of these men were professional fishermen.



"Nighttime was the preferred time for fishing in ancient times, including first-century Galilee (e.g., Luke 5:5). That way, fish caught before daybreak could be sold fresh in the morning."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Merrill C. Tenney, "John" In , in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 9: John and Acts*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 199.

<sup>3</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 589.

Though they have already seen their risen Savior on two other occasions, D.A. Carson wonders<sup>4</sup> if John highlights the fact that they spent **all night fishing in the darkness** in order to once again hit upon his so often repeated theme of darkness vs. light by pointing out that the disciples are still struggling to come to grip with the reality of all that they have witnessed regarding Jesus. They have already seen him, but their still 'in the dark,' so to speak. They know he has risen, but the full weight and significance of that truth is still settling in and has not yet fully dawned on them.

## Where They Wrong or Rebelling?

Many commentators have suggested that Peter and Company were demonstrating a lack of faith or had somehow rebelled by going fishing. However, there is no explicit rebuke or condemnation of their behavior in the text, nor does it seem to me that John is indicating that they were in the wrong.

In fact, they were in Galilee because Jesus had told them to go there.<sup>5</sup> At the Last Supper he told them he would go before them and meet them in Galilee. Then, after he had risen, he told Mary to tell the disciples to go to Galilee and **"there they will see me"** (Mt 28:10). They were not in Galilee out of rebellion, but out of obedience. However, after a long night of fishless fishing, I'm sure they wished they were elsewhere.

## Jesus Shouts From the Shore (vs.4-6)

Then just as the day was breaking and the light of the sun just peaking above the horizon, Jesus arrived and stood on the shore. It's still too early to discern faces so **the disciples did not know that it was Jesus** (v.4). Jesus is about a 100 yards (v.8) from them, so he shouted out to them, **"Children, do you have any fish?"**

Jesus calls them 'children.' The Greek word is *paidia* (παῖδιά). The NIV translates the word as 'friends,' while the ESV instead opts for 'children.' The word can be translated either way, so context must determine how this word is translated. The word can be used in a colloquial sense "much like British 'lads' or American 'boys' or 'guys.'"<sup>6</sup> According to one lexicon the word refers to...

...a person of any age for whom there is a special relationship of endearment and association—'my child, my dear friend, my dear man, my dear one, my dear lad.' In a number of languages παῖδιά in Jn 21:5 is better rendered as 'my good friends' or 'my

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<sup>4</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 670.

<sup>5</sup> Mt 26:32; 28:7, 10, 16; Mk 14:28; 16:7.

<sup>6</sup> Carson, 670.

dear friends' or 'my dear comrades.' In this context, not age, but the connotation of affection and endearment is in focus.<sup>7</sup>

If this interpretation is correct, then Jesus is calling out to his dear friends<sup>8</sup> for whom he holds deep affection in his heart, not to rebellious followers who need to get their act together.

The structure of the sentence in Greek indicates doubt or that a negative answer is expected.<sup>9</sup> The sentence could be translated, "Lads, you haven't caught any fish have you?" Jesus already knew the answer to the question before he asked it. He already knew that their hours and hours of fishing had gained them no fish. His knowledge is confirmed by their answer, "No" (v. 5).

### A Strange Command (v.6)

After hearing that no fish had been caught, Jesus then shouts back, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." After searching the waters and fishing all night, this must have seemed like an incredible statement. They have fished every section of that large lake no doubt having already thrown the net on both sides of the boat. What possible difference would throwing the net 8 feet to the right make?

Nevertheless, they obeyed. Remember they do not yet know who it is who is telling them to try the right side of the boat. Day is just now dawning. This man is on the shore 100 yards away. That's the length of a football field. Sound carries very well on calm water, but they do not recognize his voice. Yet, they decide, "Let's do it. What do we have to lose? We have nothing now. Why not give it a shot?" So off to the right they cast their net and something amazing happens. Suddenly, the net was so full of fish that they could not pull it in the boat.

Immediately John remembers something that happened on the first day that Peter, James, and John began following Jesus (Lk 5:1-11). They had passed the whole night before fishing, and that night also they had caught nothing. Yet Jesus told them to go out in the deep and let down their nets. They obeyed and they filled their nets to breaking with so many fish. John remembers this and leans over to Peter and say, "It is the Lord!" (v.7). When Peter heard this, he was so excited that he left the net, the fish, and his friends struggling against the weight of the flopping fish and he jumped in and swam to shore.

### Jesus Served Them Breakfast (v.9-14)

When the other disciples finally made it to shore they discovered that Jesus already had a fire going, fish was frying, and he had laid out some bread also. Jesus then tells them to bring

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<sup>7</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 109.

<sup>8</sup> This is a different word than the word translated 'friend' in John 15:15. The word there is *philos*.

<sup>9</sup> Carson, 670.

some of the fish they had just caught and then he invites them to “Come and have breakfast.” Can you imagine being served breakfast by Jesus? Jesus is not only Creator, Counselor, and King, he’s also a cook!

## Bread & Fish

They knew this was Jesus, but they were still finding it hard to believe. Some of them evidently wanted to ask “Is it really you?” But they dared not ask because they knew it was him. Jesus served them both bread and fish. Recall that when Jesus had appeared to them in Jerusalem while they were locked away in a room hiding, when he came and stood in the middle of them that they thought he was a ghost and to dispel their doubt he had asked them for something to eat. Someone gave him a piece of broiled fish and he ate it so they would know he was real and not a ghost (Lk 24:36-43). Recall that the two disciples who walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus did not recognize him until after he had blessed and given them the bread. And here, on the occasion of the third time that he revealed himself here also it happens over the context of a meal. There is a theme of Jesus revealing himself around meal time! Interesting, isn’t it?

## Application

This is a nice story, but what are we to hear from this? What does the Father want us to take with us from this passage?

1. **Jesus decides when and to whom he reveals himself.** We need to remember that we cannot make anyone believe in Jesus. No one comes to know Jesus, unless Jesus decides to reveal himself to that person.

**Matt 11:27 (ESV)** “All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

It is our responsibility to share the gospel of Jesus with the people around us. However, it is the responsibility of Jesus through His Holy Spirit to open up that persons’ heart in order to receive the gospel (Acts 16:14). No one sees Jesus for who he truly is, unless Jesus allows himself to be seen. So point all people to him, and pray that he will give them eyes to see.

Some only see him through this misty morning as some random guy on the beach shouting out orders. Others see him as the risen Savior of the world and the very God who called the morning into being by commanding the sun to rise.

2. **The disciples were all in & all together.** I know there are only seven disciples and not eleven, but they were all together in one boat. They were all together all night. They



caught no fish *together* and they caught a bunch of fish *together*, but through it all they were together. No one was hanging onto the side of the boat, they were all in, all working toward the same goal. Peter said, "I'm going fishing," and all the others said, "We're going with you."

Are we all in the same boat together? If you worship regularly here at HCC are you all in or are you hanging onto the edge of the boat? If we are going to be a church that makes a difference in this town and in this area, we need you to be all in. Are you standing on the beach shouting orders or are you in the boat rowing and casting the net?

If you call this church your home church, then why not become a member? What's holding you back? If you have concerns then come and talk to me or one of the other elders. If we are to be a bright light for Jesus, then we need to be firing on all cylinders. Are you serving in some way? If not, then why not? We need everyone exercising his or her spiritual gifts. Come and talk to us. We need everyone to be all in and all together!

1. We can do more together! Herb "Thanks for going with me, I would not have done that by myself."
3. **We can do nothing apart from Jesus.** These guys were professional fishermen and they could not catch one fish without Jesus. They could not do what they could do, without him. The verse that needs to sink deep into the core of our souls is

**John 15:5** (ESV) "I am the vine and you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is who bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

We may think we know how to run a church, but without Jesus, we'll run everyone off. Whatever area you think you are naturally competent in, at some point in your life you will discover, you can't do it if you attempt to do without Jesus. Jesus has a somewhat troubling habit of reminding his beloved friends that they can do nothing but waste time without him. However, with him, one can bear much fruit. Do not begrudge the times when he will take you through seasons of fruitlessness, because he is most likely preparing you for him to reveal himself to you.

4. **If you want fish, then let Jesus tell you where to cast your net.** You can cast about here and there but spend all night in the dark with empty nets until Jesus tells you where to go. And his command may seem like nonsense, but he blesses obedience.

Rid yourself of all known disobedience. Examine your heart and your life and if he reveals any area in which you are disobeying, then repent of it and then ask him to show you where to cast your net. And when he tells you, then do it quickly.

We need to pray together and ask Jesus where he wants us to cast our net? Is it Alpha? We have space in this room for more people. Why are these chairs empty? Are we casting the net in wrong place? Where should we cast our net? Is it Alpha? We want to be a church that reaches out, but how many of us are doing that? How many of you have shared Jesus with someone lately? Jesus came to seek the lost, but do we do the same? Are we seeking the lost? Or do we expect them to simply appear? We are in a season where people don't just show up. Fish don't jump into the net. We need to seek the lost and ask Jesus where he wants us to cast the net.

Oh, Lord God, please show us where to cast our net so that many people will fall in love with you.

5. **Jesus does not need us, we need him.** Don't think Jesus needs you to catch fish. Jesus had breakfast ready for the disciples before they ever even got out of the boat. God does not need us, we need him. Jesus is a Savior who serves and needs no service at all.

**Mark 10:45 (ESV)** *"The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

God can save people any way He chooses. And yet the way in which He has chosen to save is when His children share the gospel with people who have never heard it (John 14:6; Rom 10:13-17; Acts 4:12).

**Acts 17:25 (ESV)** *"God is not served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything."*

We ought not think that God needs anything from us, but in fact we need everything from Him.

God does not *need* us to bring salvation to the world, but it pleases Him to invite us to participate with Him in redeeming the lost. We ought not think more highly of ourselves than is proper. But we should consider ourselves blessed that He has called us to join Him in making disciples of all nations. Jesus does not *need* disciples, but He has chosen to save people by speaking *through* his disciples. No one will *believe* the gospel unless they *hear* the gospel. In order to hear the gospel, some one must speak it. This is the task to which Jesus has called his disciples. He calls us to this task and he himself guarantees the effectiveness of this mission.

If we want fish, then we must start fishing and then listen for His voice to tell us where to fish. And may the Lord grant us the same huge haul of fish as the disciples caught that morning for the glory of his great name.