

John 21:1-12

¹ After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. ² Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together.

1,2 It was three years since that first miraculous catch. So much had transpired. The things they had seen! The many times their hearts were overwhelmed! There were the fears, the joys, the lessons, the mysteries, and then what seemed to be the end of it all only to find out it was more wonderful and mysterious than ever. Now they are back where their lives were changed, but He did not appear.

The first verse tells us Jesus is going to appear again, but the Greek word for “appear” (*phaneroo*) is more than just to be visible. Some translations use the word “manifest”. Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words tells us: *to be manifested is to be revealed in one's true character*. Keep in mind that this what is about to happen. We are about to see again the true character of Jesus as we saw Him when He washed the feet of the disciples (John 13:3-5).

Seven of the disciples grew impatient waiting. The four others had probably gone to visit family since they were from the area. Peter, James, and John had been partners before in the fishing business (Luke 5:8-10), so they decided to make a little money while waiting for Jesus.

³ 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.

3 The time to fish on Galilee with shallow nets is in the night when the fish come up to the surface and cannot see the net. By fishing at night, you could avoid the heat of the day and bring fresh fish to the morning market. They cast the nets over and over again but did not catch a single fish.

⁴ Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered him, "No."

4,5 Jesus was again incognito. It seems He is only recognized when He wants to be recognized. It may have been the dim light of early morning combined with the distance that caused them not to know, or it maybe He did not want them to know yet. He called out to them, “Hey kids, No fish huh?” That is a more literal translation. I love the set up. Jesus is being playful! He has conquered death and hell, redeemed His own, and now back in the old stomping grounds, and He is teasing His dear friends. He knows what is about to happen.

They think He is just looking to buy some fish, so they take the bait. (pun intended) “NO!”, they answered. Malcolm Muggeridge has said that *“failure is the most creative phenomenon of life...Christianity, from Golgotha onwards, has been the sanctification of failure.”*⁶ I say, “Amen!”

Jesus is about to do the coolest thing. You see, three years earlier He approached Peter on that same shore. Peter let Jesus use his boat as a pulpit. I would like to be more like Jesus. (I mean that I prefer a boat to a pulpit.) Then Jesus had Peter push out onto the lake to fish, to reimburse him for the use of the boat. Peter complained that he had fished

all night and been skunked, “But alright, whatever You say.” The nets were suddenly bulging with fish. They had to get another boat to come help. Suddenly, Peter was overwhelmed with a sense of his sinfulness in the presence of Jesus’ holiness. He fell to his knees before Jesus and asked Jesus to go away from him (Luke 5:8). That was when Jesus called him to be a disciple. We are about to see history repeat itself in a most profound way.

⁶ 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.

6 It was déjà vu all over again. They could not get the net in the boat, so they would have to drag it to shore. Can you imagine the rush of thoughts that must have flooded their minds? “It has to be Jesus. He came just like He said He would, and He is doing what He did when He called us. It can’t be a coincidence!”

⁷ 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. ⁸ 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.

7,8 Now I do not know if John is hinting that Peter is a little slow to catch on to things, or if Peter was just so involved in dealing with the net, but when his mind caught up with the fact that it was Jesus, he threw his outer cloak on and dove in the water. A fisherman would take their outer cloak off to fish, as it would get in the way. Jews wore two layers as we saw when Jesus’ clothing was divided (John 19:24). Impetuous Peter could not wait and realized he really did not care about the fish anymore. To take the cloak meant he was ready to go with Jesus even if the others did not make it back in time, otherwise he would have left it in the boat, as it was easier to swim without it (John 13:37). It did not matter that they just scored two weeks wages; Jesus was on the shore!

The last time this happened, Peter wanted to get away from Jesus. You would think that after the betrayal, he would be reluctant to be alone with Jesus, but then maybe he wanted to ask for forgiveness. He certainly had more faith in the grace and mercy of Jesus after seeing Him deal with what his world called “sinners”. He just wanted above all else to be with Him (John 12:26). Do you (Psalm 27:4)?

I wonder if our relationship with Jesus has progressed to the point that we have the same passionate desire that Peter had. Or are we still like Peter was after the first catch? Do we want Him to leave or are we running to Him because we just have to be near Him? The last time you sensed Him drawing near to you, did you get busy to avoid the encounter, or get still to hear His heart (Psalm 46:10)?

⁹ When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." ¹¹ 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.

9-11 This type of fire only appeared one other place in John; it was the fire around which Peter stood when he betrayed Jesus (John 18:18). John noticed the coincidence and mentioned the word to take us back to that memory for what follows in the next lesson.

Where did Jesus get those fish? He must have called them to the shore just as He called them into the net (Psalm 8:6-8). And where did He get the bread? Maybe He turned the stones into bread. It would have been rebellion to do it at Satan's command (Matthew 4:3), but now, to feed His disciples at His Father's direction, it is obedience. I bet there was never a better tasting loaf of bread in all the world. It should have brought their minds to the bread of the Presence in the Holy Place (Exodus 25:30). There sat Jesus, the bread that came down from heaven for the life of the world (John 6:32,33), God with us, our spiritual sustenance, the breakfast chef!

The nets were not nylon, but probably spun wool or linen making them susceptible to breaking. The fact that a full net did not tear and lose some of the fish was miraculous. In Kent Hughes commentary on John he wrote, *"Nothing, in a person or a group of persons, is beyond his power and grace. Serving Christ in our own strength, trying to do it our own way, is like going after Moby Dick with a pickle fork. But led and sustained by Christ's strength, the net will never tear."*ⁱⁱ

¹² 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.

12 The invitation He gave when He first met them was an invitation to dinner, "Come and you will see" at 4pm (John 1:39). This last meal with them was breakfast. They had the Last Supper with Jesus a few weeks before, and now they are having the Last Breakfast. This was Jesus' third appearance to them as a group.

Did it ever seem strange to you that Jesus would bother to cook a meal after His resurrection? To dine together was to spend time in fellowship, talking about life, sharing your hearts. It is no wonder then that when dictating a letter to the backslidden Laodicean church, Jesus said He was standing outside the door, knocking, wanting to come in and dine with them (Revelation 3:20). Have you been dining with Jesus? The risen Lord wants to fellowship with you! I know it is hard to believe, probably as hard as it was for the disciples. You might want to ask just as they wanted to, "Lord, do You really want to spend time with me? Is it really You, the Lord of all creation?" He has prepared a table for you. Come and dine. King David found the table prepared by the Lord in the presence of his enemies (Psalm 23:5; Isaiah 25:6).

It is all about a love relationship between Jesus and us. That is where this was all heading. What were they doing out on the lake? Were they going back to an old love? Were they trusting in their ability to again provide for themselves? Perhaps the miracle said something to them about God's ability to provide their needs if they abandoned themselves to obey Jesus (Philippians 4:19).

My mentor, Dennis Turner was jolly Englishman. He was converted in a Japanese prison camp in Southeast Asia. He first began his ministry under a mission umbrella, but when his wife left him with their two children because of her lesbian desires, the mission quit supporting him. There he was in China, called to mission work, but without support. He decided he had no choice but to trust the Lord for his support. Later, he was called to minister to the people group who led him to Christ, but also the same people group who horribly mistreated him. I met him when he came into my hospital room in a town in the Central Alps of Japanese. He spent his days witnessing to the sick and dying in Japanese hospitals. He had a table prepared for him in the presence of his enemies, a love feast.

What God leads you to do, He will provide for you to do. The nets will not break and there will be fish on the coals. It may be with a conventional mission support system, it may be by making tents on the side (Acts 20:34), or by generous people who want to participate in your ministry. It may be that your ministry is a witness to those you work with in a secular job. It may even be miraculous support like the ravens that fed Elijah (1 Kings 17:6). One thing Peter and the disciples just learned is that provision comes from God. Provision is not the issue; a love relationship with the Giver of all good things is what we are seeing in this chapter (James 1:17).

We never again read about Peter going fishing. Peter had a much greater calling than just fishing. God was calling him to move on. Is there a distraction in your life that God is calling you to move past so that you can be all God called you to be?

Whatever you do, however God provides for you, your calling is much more than the physical work you do. You are where God has placed you to show people what Jesus is like (1 John 4:12). The income is not the main thing. To so many people, the income is what their job is all about. How sad! How meaningless! Not many people on this earth know about Dennis Turner, but he is famous in heaven. There are a lot of Japanese in heaven to whom Dennis is a hero. He is a hero to me, a hero of faith (Hebrews 11:13). He laid down his nets (he was a thread salesman) and followed Jesus (Matthew 4:19,20).

We are all a bit like those disciples. We know the Lord has risen. We know He has said He will meet us (Matthew 18:20), but we get tired of waiting. We get impatient waiting for the big revelations. We are like the children of Israel, tired of their daily manna, and wanting meat, not in God's good time, but right now (Numbers 11:4-6)! Just doing what we know Scripture commands is not exciting enough for us. But wait a minute! Is not Jesus the Word made flesh? Is not He meeting us each time we read the Word? We want something that thrills our flesh; but Jesus wants a daily time of dining together. We want a quail under glass, and Jesus has another healthy fish sandwich (or a daily supply of manna). We want excitement, which is a sign of spiritual immaturity, and Jesus wants faith that believes without seeing (Hebrews 11:6). Maybe the problem is that we have not let Him be the spice in every day. Life without the spice of Jesus can get pretty bland, so we want a fix of excitement. Is Jesus without the thrills enough for you?

Jesus stands on the periphery of our lives and calls, "Hey little one, do you have anything for Me?" You have fished all night and do not have anything. You have labored all your life and do not have anything that would impress Him. In fact, you wonder if you are not in for a rebuke because of the ways you have denied Him, but then you remember how gracious He was to Peter, and Mary Magdalene, to that wayward teen, to that criminal, even to that IRS agent name Zacchaeus, and you know He'll be the same with you. It is His nature!

You do not have anything to give Him. That is the point. He is the One who has the miraculous breakfast for you. This is the true nature of Jesus, a servant. He, again, revealed His servant nature that we are to take upon ourselves (John 13:14,15).

He invites you to come and dine. It can be a whole new day with a whole new direction and meaning in life. What are you going to do? Sail off or jump in the water ready to go wherever He leads? I am diving in, cloak and all, ready to go! You can tow the fish or sail off, but Jesus is here, and I do not want to be anywhere else but by His side. Ordinary fish sandwiches never tasted so good, for the One who serves them is so

wonderful. He serves them up every day if your eyes are open to see, and your heart is open to receive (Luke 12:37).

That was His last meal with them, a breakfast. This day is passing. It is almost time for supper! One day the supper trumpet will sound, and we will not linger on this boat of life. We will dive into eternity. He has prepared another meal for us, a great feast, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. We will probably hear Him say, “Hey little one, do you have anything for me?” We will lay at His feet the fish that He called into our nets. We will realize that without Him we accomplished nothing (John 15:5). Then we will pull up a chair to that great table and dine with Him, forever (Revelation 19:9).

Just one question tonight: What is the Holy Spirit speaking to your heart?

ⁱ Ian Hunter, *A Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1980), p.224

ⁱⁱ Hughes, Kent, *Preaching the Word, John*