

Let's Go Fishing —Rev. Denise Stone

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In today's look at the Resurrection Appearances of Jesus, we find ourselves in Galilee at the Sea of Tiberius, another name for the Sea of Galilee.

We find there are a total of seven disciples gathered one evening when Peter suggests they all go fishing. I have come to understand that fishing overnight was a common practice for fisherman of this era and location.

I know very little about fishing. I've only done it once that I recall – when I was very young on my uncle's houseboat in KY. I caught nothing and honestly I was more interested in eating my weight in shrimp cocktail than I was in catching any fish. That is the extent of my fishing stories.

If you read any of the scholarly materials on this chapter in John you will learn that most believe the original Gospel of John ended with Chapter 20. That the way that chapter ends really appears to sum up the Gospel and that chapter 21 seems to be an addition. You would also learn in reading that it does not appear that the Gospel of John was ever circulated without chapter 21. I tell you this tidbit,

not to make you doubt the authenticity of these events or the Gospel as a whole, but to make you aware that this chapter was viewed as important enough that it was added for circulation, probably by a student of the Apostle John.

Also, there has been over the centuries including modern times a tendency to allegorize the events of this passage. To give symbolic meaning to many of the things included in the story. For example, preachers have taken the phrase “cast your nets on the right side of the boat” as an example of doing the right things, rather than the wrong things. As opposed to the right or left side of the boat.

Another item that has been stretched a bit is the number of fish that was caught – 153. That is an odd number. So through the centuries people have tried to assign meanings like the number 17 multiplied in weird ways to get to 153 with 17 being a combination of numbers that represent perfection or completion. Others have assigned the numbers to letters of the alphabet and that it is the first three letters of the Greek word *Ichthys*. The word used frequently in the early church.

I tend to agree with the ones that see this number as just representing a large number of fish, as in the number of fish that were actually caught.

Now - What I know about this particular fishing story is from my readings in commentaries and articles. I know that Peter and the other disciples had caught NO fish on this night. They had given up and were headed to shore when a stranger on the beach directed them to drop their nets on the right side of the boat and that when they did, they caught 153 fish. And their nets did not break.

The disciples have just caught this huge number of fish. John (the beloved disciple as he is referred to in John's Gospel) turns to Peter and identifies the stranger on the shore as none other than Jesus himself.

In typical Peter fashion, he "girds up his loins", jumps in the water and swims to shore while the other disciples are bringing in the boat with their catch of fish. I do love the exuberance of Peter – even if at times it seems a bit overdone.

Once on the shore they find Jesus with a fire cooking with fish and bread. Jesus tells them to

bring some of the fish they just caught – so Peter runs out to the boat to get some. And then Jesus breaks bread and eats breakfast with them.

Now, we will pick up the following scene in this chapter next week. I want us to look a little longer at this text.

Jesus had given an instruction to Mary to pass along to the disciples – that they were to wait for him in Galilee. So that is where we find at least a group of 7 of them when this chapter opens.

Were Peter and the disciples waiting for Jesus? By going fishing is this evidence that they had abandoned their commission to share the Good News. Or did they just need to get fish for eating?

I would like to think they were waiting on Jesus and did what came natural to them – they went fishing. After all, prior to following Jesus many of them had been fisherman.

It is interesting that even after the multiple appearances of Jesus since the resurrection, that the disciples did not immediately recognize Jesus standing on the shore. Many of the appearance

stories have this in common. I believe that speaks to the uniqueness of the reality of the resurrection and the disciples still coming to grasp of that reality. They are not expecting to see a dead man raised to life. They are not expecting to see Jesus just appearing to them.

Can you imagine what that would have been like—to just look out and see Jesus standing before you? I have a hard time wrapping my head around it even after knowing this story for years.

The other thing that several of the appearance stories have in common is that Jesus breaks bread with and in a couple of cases eats with the Disciples.

This story is at the same time a resurrection appearance and a miracle story. The fish is reminiscent of a prior miracle where the disciples are fishing and told to cast their net to the other side and catch a large number of fish. It also reminds us of the feeding of the 5000 (not counting women and children) where Jesus takes bread and fish and feeds the multitudes.

What is our take away from this account? I think there are many different things we can get from this

story – depending on where we are in our spiritual life and relationship with God.

Perhaps we need to hear that it is okay to take a break – from our work, from our calling and go fishing. Like I said, we don't know what propelled Peter to want to go fishing. Maybe he was just hungry or still needed to provide for his family. Maybe he just liked fishing.

We are all called by God to serve and minister to others. To reach out and tell others the good news of Jesus Christ. But, we are also reminded that God took a break and established a Sabbath. A day to rest.

One of the things that impresses me by this church is that just about everyone does something, if not lots of somethings. But it is okay to take a break – to have a Sabbath – to go fishing. Let me encourage you this week to take time as the Psalmist tells us, “Be still and know that I am God.”

Perhaps we need to see a little allegory in this story and understand that when we follow Jesus and his directions, maybe we will see a great catch of “fish”

– or people – new believers. Jesus did tell his disciples that he would make them “fishers of men.”

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