

# “Have You No Fish?”

John 21:1-14

November 13, 2022

Read John 21:1-14

This is the Word of the LORD.

This morning, we shift scenes. We have been in Jerusalem with the disciples in the confusion and excitement of the resurrection day. But now, we turn our attention to what happened after the day of resurrection. What now? What happens after we are saved?

The disciples had to be thinking that the fulfillment of time and the realization of the coming kingdom Jesus proclaimed – well, all that stuff was just around the corner, right? It was just a matter of time before God’s kingdom would show up in its completeness and everything was going to be set right. For the disciples, Jesus’ resurrection was awesome, his going away and sending the Holy Spirit – ok, a little confusing and not something where they really knew what to expect – also was awesome, then the kingdom coming was going to be amazing. So, that’s going to be pretty quick, right? So....what do we do now?

Is not this the question with which we all wrestle? Ok, God, what you did in Jesus is amazing, wonderful, powerful, impressive and all that. At this point, though, that was a long time ago. We are still waiting for Jesus’ return. We wonder, then, what does all that have to do with me now? Assume it is true – and I believe it is true, ok? – what now? What am I supposed to do? What are we supposed to do? How do we relate to God and how does God relate to us?

## **I. How do we relate to God?**

This passage is all about how we relate to God and how God relates to us.

The disciples had gone through the roller coaster of emotions: the heights of jubilation on Palm Sunday, the tension and disaster of betrayal, the utter shattering of hope on Good Friday, and the shock and awe of resurrection. Scripture is such a blessing in reporting to us about Thomas, who refused to believe until he saw “the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my hand in his side” then professes the faith, “My Lord and my God!”

And then, what?

The impression we have – particularly from Luke’s Gospel – is they remained in Jerusalem and were hiding out until the day of Pentecost. But both Matthew and John talk about their going back to Galilee. We do not get any timeframe, but the sense is that it was not immediately after Thomas’ declaration. Some time had passed. Things had changed, but had they? Day followed night, and night followed day. Jesus was raised from the dead – but even the most amazing news stories fade after a bit.

And?

And there they were. Looking at each other. Wondering, “Now what?” They knew they had been commissioned to pursue the mission that Jesus had begun – the mission for which Jesus had been sent

by the Father, and now he was sending them. Not knowing and not able to sit still, Peter said, “I am going fishing.” And some of the others said, “Ok. We’ll go, too.” They went back to what they knew.

This is a more common reaction than we would care to admit. Think about it: most of the incidents in the gospels involve one-time characters who encounter Jesus. Either they were minding their own business, or they sought Jesus because of some crisis in their lives; then, they encounter Jesus; then, their lives were transformed; and, then, they went back to what it was that they were doing – doing the same things, but transformed by what had happened.

And that is OK. Day-to-day life is a reality with God.

How often we see this reaction with new believers: there is the rush of excitement, the enthusiasm and energy to go out and tell the world what has happened to them, and for a while, everything seems like it is brand new. Then, the sense of joy and urgency becomes a sense of frustration and obligation – why doesn’t everyone else see and I must try harder to make them see. Knowing nods from long-term Christians are a surprise and disappointment, “If they know too, how come they do not have more joy?” And, finally, even in a few short weeks, the new believer wonders if anything is different at all. Is day-to-day life really all there is?

Left on our own, it is difficult to maintain faith in a day-to-day world. But Jesus does not leave us alone.

What would you say? What would be your story? In an ordinary conversation on an ordinary day in an ordinary setting, what would be the story you would tell? Day to day life does not get in the way of being a disciple. If we are paying attention, it is remarkable how often Jesus inserts himself in the day-to-day.

Disciples leaving everything behind and being sent on the road like Paul are an exception, not the rule. In Acts 13, there was an entire congregation at Antioch that laid hands on Paul and Barnabas before they were sent out. They were people like you and me. They had families, they had jobs, they had bills to pay, and they had children to raise. They had faith. They gathered for worship regularly. They did things to strengthen fellowship. They were living normal lives in ways that would be very familiar to us – but for the electronics and toys we have available to us.

That congregation trained up, raised up, and commissioned Paul and Barnabas. The two went out and the rest of the congregation stayed put. They continued in their jobs, continued to pay their bills, continued to raise their children, continued worshiping, continued in fellowship, and continued with day-to-day life – all with the understanding that they had been called to be the church, together, right where they were. The reality is that most of us are right where God wants us to be; that God wants us to be his disciples doing the things we are doing. The transformed part of us is the part that tells the story of what we have seen God do in our lives and shares it with others. We are witnesses. We have stories to tell.

So, after the resurrection, what are we supposed to do? For those of us not called to travel to the mission field, we continue in our jobs or vocations (there is not retirement in the Bible), continue to pay our bills, continue to raise our children and grandchildren, continue worshiping, continue in fellowship, and continue with day-to-day life – all with the understanding that we have been called to be the church, together, right where we are. Be a witness. Share the story, over and over. Open the gospel to

Carson City and beyond. Learn other's stories so that we might be encouraged and share those testimonies, too. And watch – because with eyes open, we can see God at work in our midst.

### **We freak out when we encounter the living Christ.**

A second way this story reveals how we relate to God is that encountering Jesus is upsetting. Here, Peter is such an encouragement for us. He hears the word that it is Jesus on shore. You can almost picture the wheels turning in his head. "Ach! I'm naked!"

(To digress for a moment: remember another time when people were embarrassed about being naked in the presence of God? Adam and Eve, after they had sinned by disobeying God and eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, clothed and hid themselves. But there is a difference here in the New Testament: whereas Adam and Eve clothed themselves and hid to get away from God, Peter clothed himself and jumped into the sea to get *to* Jesus. The redeemed Kingdom of God looks different than the banishment from the Garden of Eden.)

Picture it again: gathering up his clothes, Peter jumped into the water and swam to shore. Can you see the others rolling their eyes? "What about the fish? Peter?" Peter was so anxious to see Jesus that everything else took second priority. For Peter it was an epiphany: a clarifying breakthrough where everything is the same and yet completely different. What was so important just a moment ago was not nearly as important now because something was different.

Encountering the living God does that to us. Scripture gives us plenty of examples of people whose lives have been suddenly transformed: Moses at the burning bush, Isaiah in the throne room of heaven, Paul on the road to Damascus... and so on. And, lest we get too high an opinion of the biblical characters, it is important to remember:

- Moses asked God to pick someone else;
- Isaiah lamented, "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips from a people of unclean lips"; and,
- Paul was blinded and asked, "Who are you, Lord?"

Peter's response, "I'm naked," is one with which I am familiar – not necessarily literally, but then again, I can't say it was not literally. I have related the story of my experience of calling before, but it applies here.

Back in the early 1990's, on Maundy Thursday, during the Tenebrae service where the lights are dampened as the readings of Christ's desertion and suffering were read, I had the sense of God's light shining on me. There was no hiding. It was humbling and I had a feeling – not one that I could articulate in the moment, but one that was vivid and clear – a combination of awareness of my sinfulness and nakedness before God. It was my abundant unworthiness and inability to stand in the presence of the holy one; at the same time, there was a peace and a clear sense of God's calling me into service as a minister of the gospel. "Now, I want you to go to seminary." It was both upsetting and peaceful simultaneously.

That call changed my life, and it freaked me out. Even though nothing had changed in my circumstances, everything had changed. Instead of understanding that I would practice law for a career and a vocation, my life would take a very different direction.

Encountering Jesus is upsetting.

**c. We still are not sure of who He is and how we are supposed to respond.**

A third way this story reveals how we relate to God is actually a word of encouragement in the midst of this passage: did you notice that the disciples who had traveled with Jesus and seen the resurrected Jesus – even when they got close – they were still unsure who he was. Note: uncertainty is not the same thing as unfaithfulness or disbelief.

Faith will always require ... faith. How is that for a profound statement? But it *is* true: faith will always require faith. Discipleship always involves trusting Jesus. It always involves taking a step from the known into the unknown. It always involves yielding up control – control that we do not really have, anyway. Growing in faith always requires a step of faith.

Here, the disciples who had encountered the risen, living Lord Jesus in the upper room were still uncertain about who this Jesus was. He looked like Jesus, sounded like Jesus, did things like Jesus – but was it Jesus? How could they know? How can we know?

No matter how mature you are in your faith, no matter how deeply you pray and how determined you are to be a disciple; faith will always require faith; growing in faith will always require a step of faith.

The biggest decisions in my own life – the ones that have resulted in the greatest blessings – have been decisions where I was required to step out in faith. Is this really God calling or am I just imagining things? How do I know if it is God's voice? Things have not always turned out gloriously in terms of human standards, but they have always yielded a growing sense of confidence in the God who promises to be faithful. I could not preach honestly to you today if I had not actually taken steps of faith trusting God's faithfulness; I cannot preach honestly if I do not urge you to trust God yourselves. I cannot give that faith to you; I can only encourage you to take the steps.

The disciples knew and yet they still had to take the step of faith to believe. We are the same.

**II. Breakfast with Jesus is rich story of how God loves and relates to us.**

Finally, not only is this a story about how we relate to God, it is a story of how God loves and relates to us.

**1. Jesus is amused – “Boys, haven't caught any fish, eh?”**

Humor often does not translate. Timing is difficult to write. It is difficult to pick up inflection in the written word. There are scholarly papers written about Jesus' line here, calling out to the disciples using a word that means, “boys.” Some have suggested it is a kind word of his paternal affection. I do not think so. If you have ever spent time around guys, you know trash-talk when you hear it. Jesus was trash-talking the fishermen in the group.

This is my alternate to a flat reading of the text, but I do think it is accurate. The relationships mattered and I think reading it with that in mind helps us to understand better what was going on.

Think about what was happening from Jesus' perspective. He grew up a carpenter. Peter and the others were fishermen. Over the course of their travels together, you know there had been some boasting and some grand stories told about their prowess with the nets. So, there they were out on the water – which must have been pretty calm so that voices would carry – and you know that Jesus was on shore laughing. He was listening to them gripe at each other about not catching anything. John did not tell us how long Jesus had been watching, but at some point he called out, "Tough night; eh, boys?" Whether or not there was an answer, he followed up with, "Got any fish? Did you catch anything?"

Not knowing whether he was a vendor looking for fresh fish to sell in the morning market or someone just busting their chops, someone answered, "No."

You can almost see the gleam in Jesus' eye as the carpenter casually suggested to the fishermen – "Why don't you try the *other* side of the boat?"

When they hit the jackpot, Jesus must have followed up with, "Huh, how about that?!"

That was when John recognized him, "It is the Lord!" I just want to linger here for a moment. When John recognized him, Jesus must have just laughed and laughed. Yes, he had just given them an extraordinary blessing in the fish, but he also had just done about the most loving thing one guy can do for another – he got them good. I know he laughed.

Friends, God is amused by us. We do entertain God. Just as our own kids make us laugh – the things they say unknowingly, the things they do innocently and earnestly – so we make God laugh. Even when our kids are not trying to make us laugh – we do get joy out of their efforts.

I think this is an important lesson for us: God enjoys us. God is amused. We do entertain God. This is not to say that sin is not serious; it is not to suggest that faith is not serious. However, what does it mean to you to know that God enjoys you – that he loves *you*. You crack him up.

## **2. God enjoys revealing in the symbolic**

We also need to know that God is a bit of an artist. He enjoys revealing himself in the symbolic. In our passage, light was dawning. The light of a new day was dawning. You just cannot miss the connection: the light of the world came into darkness, and the darkness could not overcome it. The kingdom was beginning, fresh and new. Jesus, standing there on the shoreline, waiting, watching, ready, and bringing with him the preparations for the new day.

Have you ever watched a day dawn? It is quite a thing to go from the depths and silence of deep night to the slow revealing of what the day will be.

Then, Jesus provided everything they needed – materially and spiritually in a kind of post-resurrection communion.

The disciples had no fish other than what Jesus provided. The disciples had no bread other than what Jesus brought with him. The fire? Jesus had already started it. And not to put too blunt a point on this: without him they were lost and hungry; with him, they have communion with God.

### **Conclusion:**

This story is a simple example of what the gospels share about Jesus: how we relate to God and how God relates to us.

Jesus invited the disciples to take a step of faith (casting their nets on the other side of the boat); they were blessed beyond their ability to hold it all; they came to him with what he had given them; together they shared a meal, even while they were still trying to figure out who he was. And Jesus seems to enjoy it.

Where is God calling you to take a step of faith? If you have been trying the same thing over and over and coming up empty, what would happen if you cast your net on a different side of the boat?

And hear this: have faith. Jesus is the light of the world, the one who shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome him. Know that he takes joy in you, that he loves you, and he invites you to come – come share yourself with him even as he gives you all you need and more.

Amen.

### Questions:

1. How do you relate to God in the day-to-day? Is it accurate that “when we pay attention, it is remarkable how often Jesus inserts himself in the day-to-day”?
2. When and how have you experienced God calling you to step out in faith? What happened? How did you know or how did you decide to make that step? What did you do with your uncertainty?
3. Have you ever experienced God taking joy in you? Where have you been embraced by God – either by yourself or through the intervention of someone else?