

“I am going fishing”: These are the famous last words of a certain fisherman, as we heard in the Gospel reading. His name was Peter. This statement had to do with his work, faith, and the call of God on his life. That’s what we’re going to talk about this morning and what it all has to do with our walk with God and with one another.

PRAYER

READ John 21:1-14: 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. 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.

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.” 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. 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.

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. 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. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

The Gospel reading began with these words: **“After this Jesus revealed Himself again to the disciples...”** **“After this”** connects the previous story with the following one. The earlier story was about how the disciples were hiding out behind locked doors for fear of the Jews after Jesus had been crucified. Remember? Jesus came to them and said, **John 20:21-23, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you.” And then he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.”**

Jesus breathed on the disciples and he gave them his Spirit. This is parallel to what God did when he created Adam out of clay and then breathed life into him, and what he promised to do later through the prophet Ezekiel when he said he would breathe life into the dry bones of Israel. This is what God does. He breathes life, his own life, into his children whom he loves, renewing them, reviving them, healing their hearts.

After breathing life into them, Jesus told the disciples the most remarkable thing: He was giving them the power and responsibility to forgive sins. In other words, he was making them into little versions of himself, “little Christs,” as Luther liked to say. This was what Jesus came to do, to forgive sins.

That’s the prelude to today’s Gospel, which takes an unexpected turn. After everything the resurrected Lord had done, consider the state of mind of the disciples. They were back home in Galilee, and they were sitting around staring at each other, as though there was nothing else to do. Despite the Lord’s commission to minister to the world with the forgiveness of sins, they were just sitting on their hands.

So Peter, always the first one with a bright idea, said, **“I am going fishing.”**

After 3-years of seminary training—listening to and following Jesus around for 3-years—Peter didn’t get it. He returned to his comfort zone: Fishing. When he said, **“I am going fishing,”** his choice of words indicated that he

intended to go back to fishing for an indefinite period of time, probably forever.

We read that he and the others got into the boat and went night fishing and **“they caught nothing.”** In that region fishing was best at night, and what would have been better than to be able to go to the market the next morning with a fresh catch of fish to sell? But they couldn’t catch even one lousy fish. That must’ve been depressing. They were empty now: Empty boat, empty hearts.

But as they were still out in the water Jesus called to them, **“Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.”** The disciples looked at each other, shrugged their shoulders—“Why not?”—and they cast the net on the right side of the boat and, voila, they pulled in so many fish the boat nearly capsized!

We read that there were 153 fish. Let’s amuse ourselves for a moment with what some commentators say about the number 153:

- If one adds up the numbers 1 thru 17, as in $1+2+3$, etc., the result is 153. Seventeen is the numbers 10 and 7 added together. And as everyone knows, 10 is for the 10 Commandments, and 7 is for the 7 gifts of the Spirit!
- Others point out that in Greek and Hebrew numerology one would add up the numerical value of names and words for hidden meanings. If one adds up the numerical values of the letters in the name “Simon,” you get 76, and the word “fish” equals 77, and what do you know, “Simon’s fish” equals 153!

I think John gave us the number of fish in precise terms so that, number one, we would understand that this is an historical event. It really happened. And, number two, that it was a miracle. There had been no fish, but then there was a boatload of fish, enough apparently to nearly sink the boat.

Consider how Peter, a fisherman’s fisherman, could not find a single fish in the sea. But Jesus showed him the way. There is irony in this. With Jesus’

history as a carpenter and itinerant evangelist, there was no record that he ever fished a single day in his life. Nonetheless, he knew where the fish were.

And this is the most important part of this story: Jesus showed the disciples that he was the Lord of all Creation.

Let's ponder what we've learned for a moment. Jesus died for our sins and then he rose from the dead. In one fell swoop he changed our path from one of darkness into light, from death into life, from heartache into love. And then he gave his disciples—including you and me—a task, a simple task, the forgiveness of sins that others might know his light, love, and life. And then he demonstrated his lordship: He knows where the fish are.

Friends in Christ, Jesus knows your heart, and he wants to fill it with his love. He knows your deepest fears and he wants to replace them with life. He knows the path you trod and he wants to bathe it in his light. If we would only relinquish ourselves to him, he would fill us with his light, love, and life.

On that day on the beach of the sea of Tiberias, I believe, Peter finally understood what this meant. For his Lord and Savior even showed him how to fish. He'd reached into his heart and revealed his love for Peter. And Peter then began to think about how he would take this same love to other people.

That's our call, to take Jesus' love to other people. Jesus knows where the fish are. He knows your life, and he loves you the way you are. And he wants us to share the Good News of what we've received from him with other people, his light, love, and life.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this week let us give thanks for how the Lord has given us life through his life.

Let us consider how we can use the resources the Lord has given us to share this life with one another.

And let us look for an opportunity to use the greatest gift of all—the forgiveness of sins—with another person who really needs to know the light, love, and life of our Lord and Savior, Jesus. Amen.