

When Jesus Shows Up: To Fishermen

John 21: 1-14

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Now what?

Ever found yourself saying that?

You were working through a particular plan, and everything seemed to be humming along just fine until **<WHAM>** you hit a proverbial speed bump.

Hoping, say, to extend the life of your vehicle by an extra year or two, when suddenly the shop guy is on the phone with some enormous repair quote.

Hoping to be able to work a few more years before retiring when the offer of a buy-out package is presented.

Hoping the Leafs would win the Stanley Cup, but - well - the usual...

Hoping to attend a particular school, but discovering that the funds you've saved aren't going to make it happen.

Hoping he'll go on a date with you, but then seeing him escort another girl along the sidewalk.

Now what?

When the one who you've followed as Rabbi as friend over the last three years raised your hopes about a free nation, about a new sort of relationship with God - when that Significant Person gets arrested, and is murdered, and three days later rises from the dead -

- appearing to you and some of your friends in Jerusalem,
- and then disappearing again for a stretch of time when that happens....

...now what?

What do you do if you're the disciples of Jesus in the weeks after Easter?

Let's hear what they did as the Bible records it -

JOHN 21: 1-14

What do you do if you're the disciples of Jesus?

You do **exactly** the same thing as what you were doing when Jesus picked you out of the crowd in the first place -

- you do what you know best
- you pick up where you left off.

Into the fishing boat.

Which,
if it sounds familiar,
is.

Flip your bible back to Luke 5 and you'll read an account of when the disciples are first called by Jesus.

Peter, James and John have been fishing.

All night they've been fishing.

Typical fishermen of that day often went fishing at night in their open craft on the large Lake of Galilee. Their hopes were to catch a good supply of fish which then could be sold fresh at the morning market, providing them with an adequate income.

No fish meant no income. And that, of course, meant trouble.

In Luke 5 Simon, James and John were in trouble. No fish. Till Jesus calls them to try again. They protest, but let down the nets and catch so many that their nets begin to tear.

Simon Peter falls down in front of this wonder-working Jesus and begs him to leave - very aware of how small he was compared to this great person.

That was three years ago.

There was a crucifixion and resurrection between then and now.

Jesus seems to be gone.
He's not here to give directions.
So - Now what?

Back to the night fishing.

Like in Luke 5, here in John 21 they come up empty handed.

By the time they meet up with Jesus it is the very early gray, misty dawn of morning - the word used in the original language of the Bible indicates the time when the birds just start to rub the sleep out of their eyes;

the time when those on night shift haven't quite got their second wind and are the most groggy and irritable, tired, cold and hungry.

In that gray zone, not night any longer, and not quite day - Jesus calls.

"*Children, you have no fish, have you?*" The way the question is phrased, it **expects** a negative answer.

Ever come home after a fishing trip where you left with high expectations of a good catch, load the boat back on the trailer, and have to admit to those standing around that you got skunked?

Not a great feeling is it? Especially when you're tired, cold, and hungry.

But that's what Jesus forces these fishermen to do. Consider and admit the emptiness of the boat, their inability to get anything, the futility of their own efforts, their powerlessness to do anything about -- no matter **how** hard they try.

Did you know that NEVER in the Bible do the disciples catch a fish without Jesus' help!? Nothing significant happens without his blessing and intervention!

These fishermen, whom Jesus said would become fishers-of-men end up empty-handed every single time without the direct intervention of the Lord in their lives.

As we consider our lives, our goals and dreams, the state of our moral and spiritual well-being, our relationships with others --

How would we answer to Jesus' question, "*How has your fishing gone?*"

One of the groups that deals a **lot** with futility in life is Alcoholics Anonymous. One of the principles they work with, taken from Scripture, is "*Recognize Your Incapacity To Succeed.*"

There will be no progress in life, they say, unless and until you are willing to do a rigorous inventory of your life, and take full and deliberate ownership of whatever part, big or little, you have played in the breakdowns and damaged corners of life.

No progress till you can admit that your proverbial nets are empty, and then turn your powerless, empty boat of life over to God.

As one old-time preacher put it, "*The consciousness of my failure is the pre-requisite to my appeal to Him to prosper my work.*" [Maclaren, p.352]

There they are at the dawn of day - empty-handed, heavy-hearted. What they don't know is that the dawn of something bigger than just another day is here.

It is the dawn of a whole new future for them.

It is the dawning of a new era.

It is the dawning of a new chapter in history.

It is the dawning of the Church.

From night to day -

You may be interested to know that John tells the story of Jesus using the theme of night a bunch of times.

- Nicodemus the spiritual seeker comes to question Jesus at night (3:2)
- Judas leaves to betray Jesus at night (13:30)
- Peter denies Jesus at night (ch.19)
- Jesus breaks out of death before dawn appears (20:1)
- the disciples are huddled in fear in the dark (20:19)

As night breaks, and new light dawns, the command comes from the beach to toss the nets on the other side.

How hard do you think it was for the tired, wet, hungry, baffled, frustrated disciples to hear some shadowy figure on the beach ask them, with an obvious negative slant, if they caught anything, and then **command**

- get it? Not ask or suggest, but **command** –
them to toss that net
one **more** time?

How hard do you think that was?

Consider the moment. Taste their frustration and sense of futility. How much easier it would have been for them to say,

"No - we tried that some time ago and it didn't work then.

Why should it now?"

-- yet.... they did it!

I'm not sure what it was.

The bible doesn't tell us.

But something compelled them to try it.

Doesn't even say if they expected it to work,

or if they sighed deeply

or complained about a sore back

or maybe even cussed a bit.

Some unseen force that they couldn't see, couldn't control, and didn't really know, made them toss that net back in.

And **WHAM!!!**

153 fish.

A great big whole bunch of them.

There's no significance, by the way, about that number. It is just the historical accounting of a fisherman, making sure that you are aware of every last inch of fish that was dragged onto that beach. Not one single big one is allowed to get away from your attention.

Without the net tearing, at all.

Because when Jesus provides, he'll make sure the resources to deal with the provisions will also be sufficient.

Do the disciples understand it all?

No.

Does Jesus work through them anyway?

Yes.

The Son of God doesn't always lay everything out neatly, with full, footnoted and graphed explanations of what he is doing, and when and why.

He simply calls for his followers to obey.

And He makes sure of the results.

Actually, somehow in some unseen way, he even motivates them to respond -

- yes he does that, in the dawning of the new era of His Kingdom.

And in that new day, there is no more fear.

Unlike Luke 5.

This time Peter jumps into the water to get to Jesus as fast as he can.

He's seen enough.

Doesn't understand it all - not by a long shot.

But he's experienced Jesus rising from the dead.

He's experienced Jesus turn an empty boat -

- symbol of an empty life -
into a full one.

And Peter wants in.

The others aren't far behind - they're still dragging the full net to shore.

Peter realizes it later, and pulls the net onto shore.

Onto shore they all come, to a charcoal fire.

There are only two instances of a fireside scene in the entire New Testament.

The first is around Peter's denial of Jesus, in the dark, cold sinister time of death and denial.

The second is here - where Jesus welcomes the disciples. Here it is daylight. Here there is nourishment. Here there is fullness instead of emptiness. Welcome instead of rejection and denial.

It is a **WHOLE NEW BEGINNING!**

And the one who fed the 5000 in John 6 invites his friends to sit down. The One who is called the *Bread of Life* invites the disciples to breakfast. And quietly invites them to participate in his work with this little tidbit - v.10 - "*Bring some of the fish that **you** have just caught.*"

Say what?

WHO caught?

WHO made it possible?

What gentle, divine, generous grace from Jesus!!!

The fish that YOU caught....

...Yes, Jesus, we dipped the nets.

But YOU filled them.

Which is life in the New Era of the Kingdom.

We work.

Propelled and motivated to do so by the unseen but very present Holy Spirit power of God.

Without us even fully appreciating, always, what is happening.

And Jesus fills our work with meaning and fruit.

In gracious generosity counting our little effort as of benefit to His holy kingdom!

Wow!

The evening you took on the phone to listen to the person sobbing on the other end.

The generous financial gift you entrusted to a particular agency.

The moment you took the time to invite a friend to join you here in worship.

The day you opened your home to the new person sitting in the pew beside you.

That afternoon when you picked up the phone and called your M.P. to share your environmental thoughts as a steward of God's Creation; or to raise the issue of the rights of a vulnerable group in society.

The time you donated to teach a Sunday School class.

Friend of Jesus living in the new day that dawned out there on that beach in Galilee,

in the dawn of the Era after the Resurrection

"Bring some of the fish that you have just caught."

Even when we don't fully understand.

Like the disciples.

Or fully know what to do next.

Like the disciples.

In verse 12 we read that they didn't dare to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord.

They knew it in their head.

But their eyes didn't quite recognize him.

Their emotions couldn't get fully wrapped around what had just happened.

They couldn't see it totally for what it was.

And in verse 13 we read that Jesus has to invite them to sit down and eat.

I picture them standing around with their mouths hanging open. They're too stunned to move.

"Go ahead, sit down and eat."

The uncertainty, the hesitation, the doubts, the surprise on our part -

Jesus calls us anyway!

He invites us to spend time with him, anyway!

And he will use us, anyway!

No wonder that in short time fish and bread became an early Christian symbol for communion with Jesus,

for the community of those who spend time with, and serve, Jesus.

The mosaic pictured on the screen is from the floor of an ancient monastery on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee.

As a symbol of the new era that dawned on that beach.

And the invitation to participate in the work of Christ's mission.

And the gracious consideration of our efforts towards the good of that mission.

And the blessing of what is done under His guiding Hand.

All of which came to that little band on the beach.
And continues to you and me here at Calvin Church.
Who follow behind them.
With our nets.
In His service.