

Reading from the New Testament: John 21:1-19

Fishing in the Living Waters

Rev. Tom Hagood

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Some of my best memories of my childhood growing up in Central Florida revolve around fishing. Both my dad and mom loved to fish and that same love grew within me. I can remember those times when I'd be awoken at 4 a.m. on an early Saturday morning to drive out to a huge bass lake near Kissimmee, Fla. Sunrise was the best time for fishing because the large mouth bass were hungry for the little shiner on the end of my line. We used to catch a lot of fish in those days.

I also remember the last time my father and I went fishing. Times were different then. We struggled in our relationship. I was enmeshed in the family business and I was trying to decide about whether or not I should go to seminary and make a big change in my life. Dad preferred that I stay with the business ... but something else was tugging on my heart.

We headed up to Lake Allatoona and fished from a boat through the morning into the early afternoon. It wasn't like the times we used to fish in Florida. The gray cloudiness of that day only seemed to intensify the strain between us. I wanted to talk about my call to ministry ... Dad wanted to talk about how the business could still be a success. He cast on one side of the boat. I decided to cast on the other.

We fished for awhile ... no words between us. And on that day, in the midst of the pain of my relationship with my father ... I encountered the living waters of Jesus Christ ... and my life was changed forever.

Peter and the other disciples had been struggling, too. You would think that after the resurrection of Jesus Christ and his appearance to them on two occasions would have made everything quite clear to them. Surely they were dedicated disciples by this time. Didn't they get it? I'm not so sure. It doesn't seem like they did.

So after three years of walking with Christ ... after his death and resurrection ... the glory of that Easter day ... where do they go? They head home. They head home to the Sea of Tiberius ... or better known as the Sea of Galilee. They go back to where they came from. They go back to the shore ... to their boats and their nets. They have some decisions to make ... do they go back to their old way of life ... or do they follow Christ into the unknown?

That's where our story picks up this morning. The disciples decide to go fishing. Listen with your heart and let the Holy Spirit fill you with the Good News of the Gospel of John, Chapter 21, verses 1-19. I will be reading from the New Revised Standard Version.

1 After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way.

²Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in

Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples.

³Simon 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.

⁴Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.

⁵Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." ⁶He said to them, "Cast the net to 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 there were so many fish.

⁷That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea.

⁸But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

⁹When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread.

¹⁰Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught."

¹¹So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn.

¹²Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord.

¹³Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.

¹⁴This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

¹⁵When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs."

¹⁶A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep."

¹⁷He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep.

¹⁸Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go."

¹⁹(He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God!**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in Thy Sight, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sometimes we're just not sure what to do. Choices we face in life can be so hard to make. Particularly the ones that will require us to change something about how we live our lives. And to be honest with you, most of the time when I've had those kinds of choices to make, I, too, acted like those disciples. Oh yes ... I want to do the right thing ... I want to follow Jesus ... but all this other stuff in my life just seems to get in my way.

It's too hard to change. And I wonder ... even after all the blessings God has bestowed upon me ... all the times Christ was there walking with me ... all the times I've stood at this table and felt goose bumps rise on my skin as I broke the bread and poured the wine ... life changes are still so hard to make.

So there on that beach ... Peter and a few other disciples are wondering what they are going to do with the rest of their lives ... what changes are they going to have to make. Oh sure, they believed Christ was the Messiah ... they had heard his very words ... seen him perform so many miracles ... they even saw his wounds ... then why did they sit there on that shoreline wondering what they were going to do next?

Could they do what he asked them to do? Could they actually find their voices and stand firm in their beliefs and share the Good News ... even at the risk of their own lives? But it seems that now they aren't so sure. Because there on that beach ... in the darkness of that night ... their fears are still with them ... their doubts still cloud their minds.

But you know ... I think that is precisely where Christ wants them to be ... to be lost in their fears and doubts. That's where we will usually find our Risen Savior. To commit to something new in your life ... to risk changing something ... to head in a totally new life direction ... is not something you should ever enter into half-heartedly. Because if you're not willing to commit your whole being ... your entire mind and your soul ... if you're not willing to risk standing completely naked and vulnerable before your Lord ... completely honest with who you are and what is in your heart ... you will probably fail.

I know ... I've failed many times before. Some of you are great caretakers ... you take care of people who have all kinds of problems ... usually problems that could use some tough love, but you don't want to deal with those problems. It's so much easier to just enable someone's bad behavior ... to put up with someone's bad habits ... than it is to risk changing them.

It's so much easier to deny that someone in your family has a drinking problem ... or is addicted to drugs ... or gambling ... or sex. It can be so much easier to just deny that someone is abusing you with hateful words that sear the very core of your soul. It can be so much easier to make up

excuses about why your spouse doesn't seem to have time to spend with you or your children ... after all, they're just too busy and overwhelmed or too important and powerful to worry about you ... even if you need something more from them ... their time, their attention, their love.

It can be so much easier to just build a lifelong anger against a parent because when you open your mouth they would rather tell you what to do than to listen to you ... when all you really need is someone to stop and hear what is on your heart ... for someone to listen without judgment ... even to hear something from you that might cause them pain, even when it is said in love.

And we keep right on fishing ... hoping to catch something that will feed us ... but nothing really changes ... and we aren't fed. We're still so scared. . . so scared that some of us would rather just keep on putting up with something ... keep on hurting ... because at least we're used to that kind of pain ... we're just too afraid to risk taking a step toward the life Christ wants us to have.

But sometimes ... we spot Christ on the shoreline and we recognize him ... and we listen to him ... and he offers us a way to begin to change our lives. It usually happens only after we've been hurting inside for such a long, long time ... and we've just about lost our zest of living ... and we can't keep putting up with that deep ache inside our guts ... when we long to be fed and nourished and to be made whole again.

Christ knew that about his disciples. They needed to be there on the shoreline alone with their fears. They needed to experience the darkness of the night. They needed to cast their nets and keep bringing them back up empty. And so do we.

Because changing your life means you're willing to risk the pain of change ... it means knowing that what Christ is leading you to do will be so much better ... even if it means you're going to feel the pain of change ... even if you're going to come up with a thousand excuses about why you can't do it ... even if you're going to have to get down on your knees and cry to the Lord ... screaming the words "Why have you forsaken me."

And then ... only when we are able to name what scares us ... are we able to accept the hand that Christ gives to us ... to help us overcome it ... and to do what we thought we couldn't do. Do you know why the disciples couldn't catch any fish? Because they were fishing on the wrong side of the boat.

You see ... on the shore of the Sea of Galilee ... there are many springs along the shoreline that empty into the sea. The picture on the front of your bulletin is one of the larger springs that is actually right in the vicinity of where it is believed Christ had breakfast with his disciples. The water is oxygenated around those springs ... the fish like to gather in those places. They are living waters ... full of life.

And Christ ... told those disciples ... to cast their nets into those living waters ... and from those waters came fish ... more than they could manage ... and Christ fed them on that shoreline ... he fed them physically and he fed them spiritually ... and he gave Peter and the other disciples the words they needed to hear to make their life-changing decisions at that moment ... three times he said ... "Feed my Sheep."

And right now ... if you are willing to listen ... Christ is standing there on that shoreline ... He is telling you to fish on the other side of the boat ... to drop your hook into the living waters ... to haul in a catch so plentiful that you won't be able to handle it all. To feel the power of the Holy Spirit filling you with the strength to do what you must do ... to even be able to risk the pain that will occur to break through whatever it is that you deny ... to be fed by Christ with the food that will sustain you through this time of change ... and to be the Christ-centered person you are called to be ... to find the wholeness and healing you have so longed for and desired for in your life.

Sometimes ... like I found out on that day on Lake Altoona ... we have to come face to face with the truth in our lives ... and be willing to share them with God ... and then to let go ... and to allow Christ to do one of the most amazing things in your life that you will ever experience.

Healing and wholeness are there for you ... Christ wants you to have it ... Christ is waiting for you ... telling you ... drop your nets on the other side of the boat ... into the living waters that I offer ... and follow.

Let us pray:

O Lord, with Your eyes You have searched me,
And while smiling, have called out my name.
Now my boat's left on the shoreline behind me,
Now with You I will seek other seas.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.