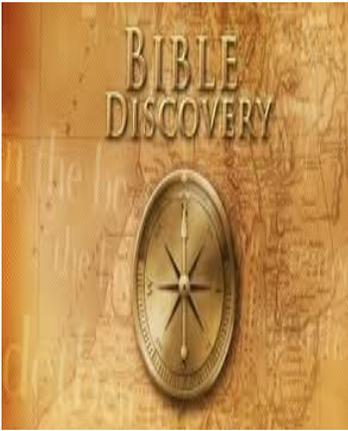


May 1, 2016  
John 21:1-19

## Love asks, Have You any Fish?



Can you believe Good Friday and Easter were a month ago already? Some 2000 years ago the crucifixion and empty tomb caused quite a stir in Jerusalem. The recent movie, *Risen*, depicts a Roman soldier's view of the events and his subsequent conversion as a believer. The resurrection changed the world of its day; continuing to revolutionize our world today. In our modern times, with our sophistication, the risen Christ affects the way we act, either drawing us to God or leaving us with the decision to reject God's love. Praise God! His love's revealed at unexpected moments changing us forever *if* we allow our hearts to be open. His disciples were overcome with relief when they encountered Jesus; their grief was turned to joy. Today, as probably then, many say the appearances of a risen Christ are just visions - the disciples, in their grief, see what *appeared* to be Jesus. Some insist they'd hallucinated. Such explanations fail to satisfy the change to the distraught disciples, change leading to a world turned upside down; to a 2,000 year march of God's faithful through the ages living changed lives, proclaiming the triumphant message: Jesus is alive! Such explanations are as fruitless today. Jesus is indeed alive!

Then we come to this strange 21<sup>st</sup> chapter which demonstrates once and for all the reality of the Resurrection. The disciples had received audacious promises from Jesus. The promise of a comforter, God's Spirit; the promise their grief would be turned to joy, the promise the Father would give them whatever they ask in His name. They'd been called to a higher service to the whole world. Yet nothing happened. Yes they obey Jesus in going to Galilee. [Ref. Matthew 28:16] But the waiting and the watching seems to have taken their toll. Can we relate? The disciples' minds, tired from the strain of delay, perplexed by waiting, frustrated nothing happened, so now back at the location of their old vocation, back to what worked for them, back to what they knew how to do, several turn to their old way of making a living.

### **Abandon of God's Call was like Surrender to Caesar?**

Just imagine Peter watching boats putting out for the fishing grounds. Little wonder he announces he's going fishing. Six of the disciples go with him. It's getting dark, prime time for fishing. John tells us they're at the Sea of Tiberias, renamed for Tiberias Caesar. Interestingly, John's Gospel is the only one to use this 'legal' designation rather than as the locals referred to it, the "Sea of Galilee". Was John connecting the disciples' return to worldly pursuits? Was he suggesting abandon of God's call was like surrender to Caesar? Was John challenging our motivations and pursuits? Perhaps the disciples went fishing to get away from the ridicule of the scoffers or to simply clear their minds. More likely they went to fill the hours, to have something they knew how to do to fill their days. Could it be simply returning to what they know best? So, they set out to fish. All

**Do we too  
surrender to  
the world and  
give up or do  
we hold on?**

All night long they spend fishing - catching nothing. Maybe the weather could be blamed; perhaps it's the current - too much wind. Could it be their minds weren't really on the task? Their thoughts were in Jerusalem, wondering where Jesus was, wondering what would happen next. He'd said He'd meet them in Galilee. Those plans Jesus had promised, could they really be possible? What are our thoughts as we face obstacles and setbacks? How do we overcome and press on for Jesus? Do we too surrender to the world and give up or do we hold on?

As they return to shore they notice a fire burning, rising in the dim light. Jesus calls out, "*Lads, have you got any fish?*" These "professional fishermen must confess, "no"! Jesus hollers back

for them to throw their nets on the “right” side. If I can play on words for a moment, maybe Jesus is saying, “You’ve been fishing wrong, now let’s do it as I showed you. Let’s do it right!” I can imagine Peter thinking back to when he first met Jesus. Jesus had asked him to put out from shore so he could use his boat as a platform for speaking to the crowds. After finishing speaking, Jesus encourages the impetuous Peter to “*put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.*” Remember Peter’s response? “*Master, we worked hard all night trying to catch fish, and we caught nothing. But you say to put the nets in the water, so I will.*”

[Luke 5:5] As memories flood back to the mind of Peter he again finds the deep desire for obedience and I can almost hear his reply. Then they follow Jesus’ instruction - we know the result: the net is filled! It wasn’t as strange as we may think today. It was common for someone onshore or at the water’s edge to assist those fishing. From the shore one sometimes can see fish better than those out on the water.

Of course this is more than just a story of the disciples going fishing, more than Jesus calling them to put their nets out once more, more than catching a massive catch of fish. It’s the story of Peter and his ministry; it’s the discovery of what the Lord really desired of his life. It’s also a story about turning away from a focus on temporal things to a ministry for bringing life, eternal life; something all of us should be doing. Overcome by the great catch of fish, and perhaps a bit ashamed of having retreated from Christ’s calling on his life, not to mention the assured shame from denying Jesus three times, Peter had responded to John’s announcement, “*It is the Lord*” [vs.7] by wrapping his outer garment around him and jumping into the water making his way to shore. Yes this was still the impetuous Peter indeed!

**It’s a story about  
turning away from a  
focus on temporal  
things to a ministry  
for bringing eternal  
life!**

As Peter and the other disciples get to land they see a fire of coals, fish and bread on the fire. Here we’re told, “*Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish*” [vs. 13]. Jesus feeds the disciples as he fed the hungry crowd. It’s another example as Jesus reminds them of their previous experiences with him demonstrating nothing has changed with Him; that the ministry He’s calling them to isn’t a forlorn, wasted plan but the exact direction they’re to pursue in the power and eternal presence of Christ. Jesus once again shows them, and us, a true leader’s a caretaker, compassionately ministering to all Christ gives for their care, following the example of the Master, never again returning to a worldly way of life. From the start Jesus says to them, when He called them into becoming His disciples, “*Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.*” [Mark 1:17]. Have you heard Jesus call?

This is the time when the ‘rubber meets the road’. It’s decision time. Everything’s laid out for them emphasizing what Jesus wants his disciples to do. The risen Lord’s not a vision, not a figment of someone’s imagination, not the appearance of a ghost; it’s Jesus, who has conquered death and is alive; He’s calling his followers, drawn together in love by His resurrection power. It’s unity restored; it’s mission renewed. It’s disciples responding to Jesus as a living person, not a vision that makes all the difference in this world.

Jesus gave these men an incredible mission. Now they have unmistakable proof of Christ’s resurrection, leaving them ready to share this Good News with the world. Since Peter led them back to fishing, instead of being fishers of men, since Peter held to his shame having denied Jesus three times, since Peter seems to recognize the error of his ways, the Lord speaks to him, though I’m sure the others are listening in. What Jesus has to say is so critical to hear – for Peter, yes – but also for us when handling our failures, confronting those occasions when we fail to live up to our professions of faith. John records, “*So when 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.” He said to him, “Tend my lambs.” He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love You.” He said to him, “Shepherd My sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to Him, “ Lord, You know all things; you know that I love you. “Jesus said to him, “ Tend My sheep.”*”

## ***Are we casting out our nets?***

For each time Peter denied Jesus, He asks Peter to reaffirm his love. What's his purpose in doing this? When Jesus said, "*Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?*" I wonder if He was pointing to the fish they'd caught. If, in essence, Jesus is asking, "Do you love me more than these fish you abandoned ministry to catch?" He's saying, "I entrusted my ministry to you and your fellow disciples so you would fish for men showing them eternal life, yet you've returned to being satisfied catching fish from the sea pursuing the goals of man. Don't you love me more than these fish?" Might Jesus be asking you this today? What has distracted us from serving our wonderful Lord? Matthew Henry wrote, "Jesus manifests himself to his people by doing that for them which none else can do, and things which they looked not for. He would take care that those who left all for him should not want any good thing." In short Christ meets each of us with all our need so we will place our service to Him foremost on our minds and in our hearts. Just like the nets that caught a multitude of fish that day, the Lord's Gospel is of sufficient strength and fortitude to hold those who're drawn to the amazing love of Jesus. ***Are we casting out our nets?***

**Might Jesus be asking you this today? What has distracted us from serving our wonderful Lord?**

When Peter responds to Christ's questions with affirmation, Jesus tells him such love must then compel him (*as it does us*) to be committed, concentrating on those Jesus was leaving to Peter's care. He's not talking fish, lambs, or sheep; He's talking ministry to the people of this world. Since Jesus said all of this not only within the earshot of the other disciples, but to us, we know we're also to be loving and compassionate caregivers to our Father's world *and* those who dwell within it. It's through this loving example we'll lead people to become followers of Jesus – for today and to heaven and life eternal.

Have you felt failure in your walk with the Lord? Has there been occasion when you doubted, surrendered to worldly pursuits, abandoned your faith? The Good News Jesus brings is the message given to Peter. Jesus forgives and restores. Will we listen to his voice calling and respond? If you would like to speak further on this or any issue in your faith, give us a call or drop an email.

***Blessings,  
Pastor Dave***