

Sermon Discussion Questions & Follow-Up Notes

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Rev. Dr. Andrew Keuer

(andrew@firstprotestant.com)

Sermon Text for Easter 5: John 21.1-14

Title: "The Fishermen's Failure" / Series: "Things He Heals"

Core Observations of the Text & Questions to Ponder

1. Night – Now two+ weeks after Jesus' resurrection, the disciples as a group have seen the Lord twice (see John 20:19-20 and 20:24-29). Both times Jesus announced peace over them. With the Passover celebrations completed, some bible students mistakenly think the disciples threw in the towel and went back home. But more likely is that they remembered what Jesus had told them in Mark 14.28 (to rendezvous back in Galilee after Passover wrapped up). As they waited for Jesus, they were hungry and so went to work. But they catch nothing. What now?

Discussion #1: The disciples hung together even when it seemed there was no spark, newness or joy. What helps you stay true to your principles and to God's Word when you're working hard but nothing transformative seems to be happening in your life?

2. Loyalty – Some three years before, the disciples left everything to follow Jesus. Before meeting Jesus, they each had their own boats, but now they share one. Their discipleship bond holds fast.

Discussion #2: In the sermon it was mentioned that in the second half of life, friendships sometimes become more occasional co-pilot, backup, on-call type of relationships. Have you experienced this? What have you learned about the importance of having a few "3 AM friends"?

3. Resurrection Light – The power of the resurrection dawns on the disciples in four ways:

A. Jesus' Word: Jesus stands on the shore and asks them to acknowledge their need (21.5). He tells them something they already knew and were already doing (i.e., "don't just fish in one spot, but try both sides of the boat"). Sometimes God's Word does not tell us something entirely new, but it sanctifies what we are already doing.

Discussion #3: Share a time when you found being in God's Word in the morning (even for a few short minutes) to be a valuable discipline.

B. Mutuality: When Peter speaks at the beginning of the episode, everyone falls in line (see John 21:1-3). But after Christ addresses them, John's voice becomes essential (see 21.7). Christ's Word introduces mutuality. Peter the sole visionary now becomes dependent on the spiritual discernment of the other disciples. Peter depends on John twice over – first, to identify Christ (21.7), and second, to tell the story of Peter's restoration (21.9 and 21.15-19).

Discussion #4: What is the difference between being a part of a spiritual community directed by a visionary leader and a community growing through mutual discernment of God's presence?

C. Forgiveness: In 21.7 we notice that Peter puts on his outer cloak before he jumps in the water. It's like he zips up his jacket to swim a few laps! At the beginning of the bible, clothing is a symbol of shame. Peter knows he betrayed Christ two weeks prior around a charcoal fire (see 18:15-18 and 18:25-27), and yet he races towards healing. Christ graciously invites Peter to a new breakfast where he can have that memory of failure rewritten in the presence of Christ (21.9).

Discussion #5: What encourages you to flee TO Christ when you realize that you have sinned?

D. Multiplication: Jesus tells the disciples to “draw in” the fish they caught (21.10-11), which is a reference to Jesus’ words in John 12.32 (“when I am lifted up on the cross, I will draw in all men to myself”). Their net, which is a symbol of their loyalty to one another, supernaturally holds 153 large fish (21.12). The number 153 is a triangle number (17 by 17 by 17, which is $7 + 7 + 3$, a symbol of the perfecting of the whole world). The catching of large fish fulfills Ezekiel 47:10 where it had been prophesied that a time would come when new waters would flow from a new temple to refresh the Sea and draw in large fish which are the nations. With Christ present among them, their loyalty to each other will supernaturally multiply and draw in people from every nation and tribe and tongue to Christ.

Discussion #6: Have the right co-pilot is vital for when you enter difficult moments of life. But co-pilots also are needed for the good moments, to share the joy of triumphs, growth and blessings. Who do you call when something miraculously good happens in your life?