

Easter 2 (April 18, 2002)  
THE TEXT is John 21:1-14

Delivered at St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Bemidji  
The Ultimate Fishing Expedition

1. The Lord brings about success.
2. The Lord makes his loving presence known.

<sup>1</sup>Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way: <sup>2</sup>Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. <sup>3</sup>"I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. <sup>4</sup>Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup>He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. <sup>6</sup>He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. <sup>7</sup>Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. <sup>8</sup>The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. <sup>9</sup>When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. <sup>10</sup>Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." <sup>11</sup>Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. <sup>12</sup>Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup>Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. <sup>14</sup>This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Let us pray, (from CW # 186 vs. 3)

O Spirit of life, O Spirit of God,  
Increase our faith in our dear Lord;  
Teach us to know the Father's love  
And his dear Son, who reigns above,  
O Spirit of life, O Spirit of God. Amen.

Dear partners in service to our Risen Lord,

Regarding a "fishing expedition", usually in our day, this has more to do with exploring and expediting newly found information than it has anything to do with fishing. In general, if we hear about organizations or politicians going on a "fishing expedition", it usually means they are looking for some specific information (or dirt) about a competitor or adversary. This is done in the hope that it will make them look good. In reality, a fishing expedition should mean an individual or a group of individuals are venturing out into a body of water to find and catch a trophy fish. Today, God's Word provides a new twist. It reveals an actual catch of fish on the part of Jesus' disciples, but it also shows us that having the Resurrected Lord Jesus in your life is the greatest catch of all. So let us consider "The ultimate fishing expedition".

1. The Lord brings about success.
2. The Lord makes his loving presence known.

1.

On Easter Sunday and on the Sunday after Easter, Jesus appeared to his disciples while they were hiding out in vicinity of Jerusalem. The latest appearance was recounted for us in our Gospel reading for this day, with Jesus giving doubting Thomas all the convincing proof that he needed to know that Jesus had truly risen. Now those disciples had journeyed back to the area around the Sea of Galilee. This was the area to which the angels had directed them to go. Recall the words of the angel in the empty tomb spoken to the women at Sunrise on Easter morning. "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciple: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.'" (Matthew 28:5-7).

Perhaps after waiting for Jesus eventual appearance in the area of Galilee, it was opportunistic for the disciple to work and wait. This seemed to be a better idea than to sit and wait. They proceeded with the kind of work that was old hand to them, namely fishing. After a night of no success, Jesus appears on the shore (although unrecognizable to the disciples) and calls out to them "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." So much of this account mirrored what they had once experience before Jesus' death, during his earthly ministry. Luke records that for us in chapter 5 of his gospel account. Indeed, they took notice of this. It was a time when they realized, "We've done this a time before. Jesus performed the miracle back then, so only Jesus could be accomplishing this now." So the Apostle John announces the clear and certain observation, "It is the Lord".

Consider the miraculous success made apparent before their very eyes.

- Jesus knew full well, from the shore, that they had caught no fish all night.
- Jesus caused them to pull in an abundant catch.
- Jesus made himself to be unrecognizable to them at first.
- Even with the great catch of 153 large fish, their nets did not break.
- Jesus fed them with an ample supply of hot fish and bread, before the fish were even brought ashore.

Actions speak louder than words. Jesus' activity in every life speaks volumes. By this miraculous catch of fish, Jesus' power and presence is acknowledged. The Lord's actions speak for him. They tell the story. Consider those rich blessings and miracles Jesus still distributes, still displays and still dispenses into our lives.

- Human life is one example. It is truly fragile. It is still created by God. The Psalmist writes of our Lord, "You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well" (Psalm 139:13, 14). I've heard parents refer to a child as a miracle baby. Usually it is because of seemingly insurmountable circumstances which existed early on, maybe at the time of conception or at birth. I understand their reason for such a characterization. But, in truth, every infant born is a miracle baby.
- At baptism, Jesus still grants the gift of faith. He still adopts and claims another soul for his keeping through water and the Word.

- Talents and abilities make it possible to earn income.
- Family and friends keep us from living this life in loneliness.
- God's inerrant and inspired Word speaks an indispensable truth about our constant need for God's mercy and love. It further assures us of the gospel truth that God's grace is bigger than our sin, God's power is bigger than our weaknesses, and God's plan of salvation far supercedes our plans that merely take us from one paycheck to the next.

Such success, such blessings come from our Risen and glorified Lord. What a humbling truth to ponder. Consider a time when attention or gifts have come your way without your asking or deserving. We can only swallow hard and know that to say, "Thank-you" is just not enough. How much more this is true for us in the face of Christ.

- We have done everything to jeopardize any good rapport with him. We have been guilty of cheapening his grace, by thinking that when sin gets the best of us we can just say, "O well, God will forgive me anyway, so why not jump head first into this sin."
- Consider the times we have not behaved in the Christian manner we so readily show forth in this place of worship. Satan fools us into putting our church-going behavior into a compartment or pigeon hole, thus behaving ourselves and watching out tongue when we are in the presence of our church members and leaders. The devil rejoices over our inconsistencies in living the Christian life.
- And too often we forget who we are. We live to be served rather than to serve the giver and creator of all our blessings in life.
- We fail to love our neighbor.

Yes, again with the Psalmist we must confess. "Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits – who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion . . . he does not treat us as our sins deserve" (Psalm 103:2, 3, 4, 10).

## 2.

As Jesus addresses the needs of these seven disciples by granting them a miraculous catch of fish and feeding them with a hot breakfast, Jesus further gives them the added reassurance that he has truly defeated and conquered the grave. He is alive. He is with them. And he is in control. Remember they have seen the empty cross and the empty tomb. Yes, the cross is empty and so is the tomb. This means Jesus really died and paid the ultimate price with his life for ours. Otherwise, his body would not have been allowed to come off that cross. But the tomb also is empty, further assuring all people that his victory over death is our victory over death. Nothing, or as St. Paul writes "Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither heights nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38, 39).

When a person reads the words of John leading up to our text, the last words of chapter 20, it almost seems that he is bringing his gospel to a close. For John writes, "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). Then he adds the events of our

text to give one more convincing proof that Jesus beat out death, and gained the victory over the grave.

In this way, Jesus makes his presence known to us as well as to those seven disciples. With Jesus nearby we have another assurance of his forgiveness.

- People today, do not hang around with people they do not like.
- People do not look to spend any time around someone they have not forgiven.
- People do not look forward to seeing or even being in the same room with a person that they are harboring a grudge against.

There is generally discomfort and difficulty with communication among people who do not forgive one another. Jesus clearly forgave these seven disciples for their sins of doubt. Jesus' actions and abiding presence makes that clear. In the verses that follow our text, Jesus verbalizes his forgiveness for Peter who also denied him. Three times Peter is given the opportunity to reaffirm his love for Jesus. And three times Jesus says, "Feed my sheep". (John 21:15-17)

With Jesus' forever alive, never to die again, we know that God's love and mercy is real everyday of our lives.

- God in Christ cures our sickened and diseased relationship with him.
- God in Christ crushes all barriers between us and himself.
- God in Christ comforts us when we are laden with the guilt and despair attached to our sinful deeds and decisions.
- God in Christ consoles us through his payment for sin which remains full, free and forever.

I recently read from a pastor about his confidence in Jesus' forgiveness and mercy together with his abiding presence. As every Christian should, he hinged his confidence upon Jesus' Resurrection. Just as you can not stop the sun from rising, so you and I could not stop God's Son from rising. In fact, as sure as you may be that the sun will rise tomorrow, so you can be even more sure that Jesus, God's Son, did rise. In fact, on the last Day of all the living, Jesus will appear in the sight of all even when the heavens and earth are destroyed.

The words of our text truly depicted for us today, an ultimate fishing expedition. Jesus brings about success. Jesus makes his loving presence known. God will use this same truth to motivate us and to move us in the direction of his holy will. In this way, he gives each human life a purpose for living. He ultimately uses us to make a difference in the lives of others, and to be a real source of deliverance. No rescue can outdo or outmatch Jesus' rescue from sin, death and hell. Therefore with Paul's words to the Corinthians we gladly heed his orders, "Stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Amen.