

Epilogue: DNA of Discipleship, Obedience

Scripture: John 21:1-14

Sunday, March 14, 2021

In my last sermon in John, I said that the main body of the Gospel of John ends in chapter 20, because the author concludes the main narrative by telling us the purpose of the book. And the purpose of the book was to understanding who Jesus is and thereby have eternal life in his name. Then in chapter 21 the author pens a post conclusion narrative. This narrative is focused on Jesus' expectations of those people who have now understood who Jesus is and have eternal life, his disciples. I will tackle this chapter in three sermons and that will take us right through the season of advent and into Easter. So for today we will tackle the first 14 versus of chapter 21. And this section is structured around a fishing trip that is one for the ages.

So as the chapter begins we are told that this is the third time that Jesus appeared to his disciples after His resurrection. We are told that there were 7 disciples in this event. Peter, Thomas and Nathanael from Cana who are named. Then we have the two sons of Zebedee. We also have two more disciples who are not named. By not naming all the disciples, the author being unnamed is able to maintain his anonymity. But it also reinforces the idea that Jesus was not just talking just to those seven disciples but to all disciples to come. That is why you and I need to pay close attention.

The story starts with Simon saying that he wants to go fishing. Why? Because that was his profession, and his family business. How do we know that? Because Luke 5:3 tells us that He was the owner of the fishing boats. And beyond that we have to understand the time. Yes Jesus has appeared twice to his disciples after His

resurrection but he was not with them all the time like he was before the crucifixion. So at this point the disciples understandably were not sure what was expected of them. So when in doubt Peter defaulted to going back to his family business. The other disciples we are told were also interested in going with Peter. That made sense too because they too needed to earn a living. After all Jesus was not there to provide them in miraculous and non-miraculous ways as he did for those three years. You may recall from the Gospel of Luke that there were many well to do women who were supporting the ministry of Jesus and his team when He was with them.

So they get into the boat to do what they were experts in and went fishing all night. So why were they fishing at night? Because in those days the nets were made of linen and that material was less visible to the fish at night. On the other hand, while our passage does not mention it, it most likely was a moonlight night so the fishermen could see what they were doing. The Sea of Galilee had very clear water. Scholars tell us that they would have been using a method of fishing called “trammel net” fishing. This is a method where in essence three nets are used. One is a double net that is used to form a wall in the water. This net has a large net with thick strong cords that the fish can pass through, but this net is lined with a fine net that the fish would get entangled in if they swam through it. With this double walled net, they created a wall in the lake parallel to the shore. Then they would steer the boat between the net and the shore. When they spotted a shoal of fish, they would make a great deal of noise to scare the fish. Now the fish are trapped realize they are trapped and the only way to go is up to the surface to jump up out of the water and over the barriers. That is when a third net known as the verandah net is cast. It is thrown on the surface of the water to

trap the fish trying to jump. This method of fishing is still in use today in the Sea of Galilee. That is why considering the clues in the Gospel accounts scholars believe it is this method being used. The bottom line is that Peter and his crew knew how to catch fish in the Sea of Galilee. Now trammel net fishing is very labor intensive. It is a lot of work to set the nets in the water, you need a big crew and every time you use the nets you have to spend a lot of time repairing and drying the nets before you can use it again. The material of the nets was cloth and not plastic we use nowadays so you can imagine how much repair would be involved after each use. So if you don't catch anything after all this hard work, it would be very discouraging. The disciples try and try and try all night and finally the day begins to break.

It is at that point that they can vaguely see a man sitting on the shore. They hear him asking, "fellows have you caught any fish?" And they reply, "no". To that this man tells them "throw their nets on the right-hand side of the boat and you will catch some". Just like that. Now normally no professional wants to be told what to do by an amateur. And also the verandah net is thrown to catch the jumping fish. If you know that they are jumping or about to. You would not throw it randomly. But in this case the experts were discouraged and desperate and have nothing to lose. So they throw the verandah net anyway.

We all know what happened. We are told that they caught 153 large fish in all. The large fish that Jewish people eat from the Sea of Galilee was the Tilapia, a fish that is very popular even today although the term tilapia is a term that covers a 100 different fish kinds in the cichlid family. Now most of the tilapia we get is the farmed kind that is fed very wholesome food. It is very rare today to get wild

caught tilapia. But these people caught the best kind of wild tilapia. You are talking about a fish that would weigh about 2 pounds. So that is more than 300 pounds of fish. Now Peter and the other disciples drag all the nets to the shore. In fact the Gospel notes the fact that the nets did not tear this much fish to be a miracle in itself. In the mean-time, Jesus already has a breakfast going for them. He has already cooked some fish over a charcoal fire and He even had bread ready. He asks the disciples to bring in some of the fish they had caught as well. Then Jesus serves them the bread and fish which I am sure they were extremely grateful for after a long night of work. The rest of the breakfast presumably is eaten in silence.

There are three main observations I will make about this teaching moment.

The first is that, there is one thing that defines a disciple more than anything else. It is obedience to Christ. You see, we may think we know how to run church or be a Christian. And we may have years of experience doing church or being a Christian. It is very easy for anyone to just fall back to what you know or have done when you are in doubt. But the message of this story is clearly, no matter how much you know, you will come up empty, if you are not following the instructions of Jesus. To be fair they would have not caught any fish if they were sitting at home. To give the disciples credit, they did go on the boat and put in the required hard work. And they did not know what the instruction from Jesus was initially. But once they had the set-up in place with the trammel nets, Jesus worked the fish in a way that only he can, then he gave the disciples the instructions and the catch is recorded for the history books. We have been using the sail boat analogy from the Megachurch to Multiplication book. This is a similar

analogy. The disciples set-up the trammel nets and Jesus is the one that drives the fish into the nets. The message to us is that if we are willing to work hard and set-up the nets and wait for the guidance from Jesus, He will tell us where to cast the nets. And when He does we have to be willing to listen. And when we do, there will be more fruit than we can humanly handle.

In our case, that means, building our prayer network, going out among the lost, search for persons of peace and doing all the things we know have worked in other places. Then our Lord Jesus will have something to work with. At that point He will direct our attention to the fish he wants us to fish. The fish won't come walking to us. We have to be out on the water, with our nets set-up. Then the instructions will come.

The second thing that this story tells us is that Jesus already has fish on the table. He chooses to use us to catch some of the fish because when we are in his home. And in his home we are neither guests nor servants. We are family members. And the one thing about family members is that each family member has a part to play in the running of the home. Jesus can do it all. He does not need any of us to help Him catch fish. But does he want to use us? Absolutely. Could Jesus have provided the disciples with a full breakfast without any contribution from them? Absolutely! Does Jesus want to do it without us? Absolutely not.

On the final day, everything we see in the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament is that our Father God wants to show off His children's contribution like any parent wants to show-off their kids art work or achievements on Facebook. And you hear the words "bring the fish you caught", you get the impression that Jesus wants to take pride in the work of his disciples on that last

day. That is why we know that there were 153 fish, but we don't know how many fish were already on the fire that Jesus had prepared in advance. Jesus was showing off the work of his disciples, right there. Does that not motivate you to contribute to the breakfast as well? You see, Jesus already has fish on the table that no human being is involved in catching. But He gives us the privilege of being contributing members of His household as well and bring joy to Jesus' face. This is something we don't want to lose out on.

The third thing we see here is that when Jesus' disciples are tired from doing what they have been asked to do, they are taken care of by Christ himself. Jesus knows that fishing is tiring work. That is why he fed them breakfast first before he did anything else with them. Before he instructs them he feeds them breakfast. Isn't that an amazing image? We may want to give up but when we hit the wall, a good verse to remember is Gal 6:9, which says we are not to become weary of doing good because if we do not give up, then at the proper time we will reap a harvest. But the harvest will only come "if we do not give up". And we don't need to give up, if we have Christ himself ministering to our tiredness. Isaiah 40:31 is also one of my favorite verses and I am quoting straight from KJV, "***But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint***".

And two verses before that it says,

He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.

³⁰ Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall:

31 But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

There is another image of God sending renewal for the weary that I like very much. It is the image of the angels coming and ministering to Jesus after he had fasted for 40 days in the desert and resisted every temptation. I have always wondered how the angels ministered to Jesus. But that is not important. The fact is that they did. In scripture we have versus like Ps 91:11 which tell us that **God will command his angles to hold us up and protect us wherever we go**. And then we have versus like Ps 121:5 which says that **“The Lord himself watches over you!**

The Lord stands beside you as your protective shade.

***6 The sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon at night.”***

We would not have all these versus addressing our protection and our tiredness if God did not know or care about it. God knows our every need. That is why he feeds the disciples breakfast that he has cooked as soon as they drag their nets to the shore. That is the kind of God we are taking our instructions from.

Listen, trammel fishing is hard work. There is no sugar coating it. But Jesus understands that we are tired and will get tired. That is why he himself makes breakfast for us.

Three lessons to focus us. Firstly, it is only when we are on the water that will we be in a position to hear Jesus telling us, where to throw the net. So let's give it all we got friends! A pastor friend of mine says, “you cannot steer a parked car”. When we get moving, Jesus will tell us which way to go. Secondly, remember that

Jesus already has caught fish without us. He does not need us but he wants to give us the privilege of contributing fish to the table and then showing off our work for all eternity. We don't want to lose the privilege of giving our Lord Jesus that joy. Thirdly, he knows that we will get tired. But he has made a provision for our tiredness as well.

So let's not grow weary in doing good because if we persist and not give up, we will reap a rich harvest. God himself will be overjoyed, and He will watch over us, his angels will minister to us and our strength will be renewed. Let us pray.