

After this, Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. Simon Peter, Thomas, (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. Simon 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. Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish? They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast your net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they could not haul it in, because of the quantity of the fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, about a hundred yards off. When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come, have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

John 21:1-14

"It is the Lord!"

Pastor Stephen Ridge

Last week, we saw in John's gospel that in the week or two after the resurrection, Jesus had twice stunned his disciples, entering the Upper Room where the disciples were hiding behind locked doors, all of them trying to digest the fact that the carpenter they had followed out of Galilee had died and yet now they were seeing him all sorts of places, doing and saying all sorts of things they could scarcely understand. And one of the most shocked of the Twelve was Thomas the Twin, who had been prepared to die for Jesus, but he was utterly unprepared to believe that the bloodied corpse he had seen on the cross was out and around and alive. Thomas was so negative about the whole business that ever since, we have called him Doubting Thomas, but he didn't doubt for long!

Once he saw Jesus, once Jesus showed him his wounded hands and punctured ribs, Thomas made a leap of faith that no one else had yet made quite so strongly and clearly. Thomas called Jesus, "My Lord and my God!" It was a perfect ending for John, because he had opened his gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God!...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." So now, John wanted to close his gospel with the picture of Jesus, in the flesh and showing his wounds to everyone while Doubting Thomas declared him Lord and God. It was everything John meant to teach in a single glimpse.

So John wrote a neat, tidy ending to his gospel, telling us that there were "many other signs...Jesus did...but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name." That's what gospels are for! We take to heart who Jesus is, and go on to trust him, for forgiveness, and guidance, and healing and help, and around the bend back to forgiveness, looking for him, heading for him more and more the better we understand him.

It doesn't get better than Thomas being blind, deaf, and dumb to the resurrection and then Jesus sorts him out, sets him up, and sends him on his way. So, at that point, John thinks his gospel is done and he ends it, only to have the Holy Spirit come calling to remind old man John of one more memory, one more sign that folks like you and me will need to hear to understand how thick is sin, and how clear is grace. We learn in the book of Acts and in 1 Corinthians 15 that the risen Jesus circulated among the apostles and disciples and even his family for some forty days after the resurrection, and Matthew's gospel tells us that Jesus had told the disciples to head for Galilee to meet him there, early on during that forty day period.

Matthew 28 tells the story and 1 Corinthians 15 confirms it, that on one mountain top in Galilee some 500 people heard Jesus teach what we now call the Great Commission, how people from everywhere would be disciplined and baptized and taught in the years going out. And my own guess is that this last story from John's gospel, this overnight fishing trip that Peter will start and that Jesus will fill with wonder took place while the disciples were on their way from the Upper Room in the holy city to the mountain top in Galilee. And interwoven into John's story is what a swirl those days were, how the disciples grasped their future only gradually, at entirely different rates and in entirely different ways, Mary and Thomas and Peter all needing grace to catch on.

We learned in our Call to Worship this morning from Luke's gospel that Jesus and Peter had done business in fishing boats before, in fact we learn from both Matthew and Mark's gospels that John and Peter both had been called to follow Jesus right out of their boats, years before the resurrection. But I think this story from Luke's gospel is helpful for a number of reasons.

Jesus' first miracle involving fishing and casting and catches took place in Luke, chapter 5, years before the wonder Jesus will perform in this morning's passage after the resurrection. Back then, the fishing disciples had only recently been called to follow Jesus and in that story, Jesus actually taught the crowds from the lakeside towns before urging Peter to set sail for deeper water to make a catch. The result was the same both years before and after the resurrection, an impossible number of fish in the net for this to be anything but a sign demonstrating Jesus' power, and his compassion for men who had been out all night and caught nothing.

And the person most deeply affected by the sign both times is Peter. In Luke, Peter was so awestruck at what Jesus had done that he lay down in the fish and said to Jesus, *"Leave me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."* But Jesus didn't leave, Jesus took him on anyway. Now in John years later, the moment he learns Jesus is on the beach, Peter pulls his robe back on over his work tunic and plunges into the water, headed for Jesus with no thought of how absurd it is to dress up for a swim, thoughtless of the other men who will have to sail that mess a hundred yards to shore, only wanting to get to Jesus first, so hungry was Peter for another taste of the redemption and hope and purpose Jesus had given him, years before, when he lay in the fish.

And again, Jesus doesn't disappoint him. There on the beach waiting for all them were fish and bread toasting on a charcoal fire. Jesus tells them to bring more fish, the bread's on him. Peter, all about doing what Jesus wants, being what Jesus needs, climbs back into the boat and starts sorting and counting the fish Jesus had sent their way. There were 153. Ancient commentators, like Jerome in the 4th century, would labor at elaborate theories about what that the number might have meant, but most likely John just wanted us to know that it was a whole lot of fish, and the second miracle was that the net didn't break.

John is careful to tell us that: *"Jesus...took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish."* It is the same turn of phrase John used to describe the feeding of the five thousand which took place in the same countryside a few years before. And the picture is of Jesus, wounds on his hands, but powerful as ever, his heart still going out to the disciples willing to follow him into the remote countryside. It was different now. Probably weeks since Jesus had shared a meal with them. Appearing here and there, but not the roadside companion who had been there every step of the way from Galilee to the cross.

Now they had to decide what to do, day by day. Fishing was yesterday's idea, today was breakfast with Jesus, with all the grace that Jesus can bring to a table. But it was still early days after the resurrection. There was still much to learn about gospel, grace, and future, still a mountain top to climb, a Great Commission to learn. And like us they would have to live it, step by step, day by day. But not alone! Jesus still had their back, and the Holy Spirit was on the way. But the grace they found at breakfast that morning, the power that filled their net, the gospel that gave them direction and purpose and discipline has reached all the way to us, and we should never take it for granted.