

<sup>1</sup> After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he showed himself in this way. <sup>2</sup> Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of Jesus' disciples. <sup>3</sup> Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We'll go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. <sup>4</sup> Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach, but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup> Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." <sup>6</sup> He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. <sup>7</sup> The disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he had taken it off, and jumped into the sea. <sup>8</sup> But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were only about a hundred yards off from land. <sup>9</sup> When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." <sup>11</sup> So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish – one hundred fifty-three of them – and though there were so many, the net was not torn. <sup>12</sup> Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" for they knew it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup> Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them and did the same with the fish. <sup>14</sup> This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. <sup>15</sup> 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." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." <sup>16</sup> A second time Jesus said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." <sup>17</sup> He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him a third time, "Do you love me?" And Peter said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep.

John 21:1-17

04/14/2024 – Saginaw First U.M.C.

"Whole"

Pastor Amy Terhune

Mickey Anders introduced me to the "friends and survivors" of Calvin College English department, who collected this list of mixed metaphors from student essays over the years and posted them on their web site. Let me share a few with you:

"He swept the rug under the carpet."

"She's burning the midnight oil at both ends."

"It was so cold last night I had to throw another blanket on the fire."

"It's time to step up to the plate and cut the mustard."

"The cows have come home to roost."

"She's robbing Peter to pay the piper."

"Let's not open that can of worms until we get this one nailed down."

"He's up a tree without a paddle."

"Keep your ear to the grindstone."

"Sometimes you've gotta stick your neck out on a limb."

“They finally got all their ducks on the same page.”

And my personal favorite: "Beware my friend...you are skating on hot water."

*[from Mickey Anders, Mixed Metaphors, in illustrations for John 21 on www.Sermons.com.]*

You seriously cannot make this stuff up!

In our scripture lesson this morning, we have a group of fishermen being commissioned as shepherds. But it's not as crazy as it sounds. There's a method to the madness. Let's start, though, with context.

Remember with me where we've been the last couple of weeks. John 20 opens with Mary Magdalene going to the tomb in the dark to find it empty. Peter and John confirm that it's empty all right. The Risen Lord then appears to Mary who goes to announce it joyfully to the disciples. They don't believe her until Jesus shows up behind locked doors that night to breathe peace into their troubled hearts. But Thomas wasn't there, so he won't believe until Jesus shows up a week later to let him touch the wounds in his hands and side. All of this happens in Jerusalem, and by the time a week has gone by, they've all encountered the Risen Christ in the upper room of the house in Jerusalem.

But when chapter 21 opens, they are at the Sea of Tiberius, which is back in Galilee. Why are they back there? I don't know. How much time has passed? I don't know. John doesn't see fit to tell us. We know that in Matthew's gospel, the disciples are told to go back to Galilee to see the Lord. But in Luke's gospel, they're told to stay in Jerusalem until they're clothed with power from on high. Which seems like a contradiction, but don't get stuck there. They have ties both places, and even though they're about 80 miles apart, which is probably a 4 or 5 day journey, Jesus and the disciples made that trip frequently, so it's not unreasonable to assume that they continued to make that trip.

It's also worth noting that the disciples probably don't have all the ducks on the same page, to a borrow a mixed metaphor from earlier. At least, not yet. They haven't yet received the Holy Spirit, which will be poured on them at Pentecost. They're still processing everything that's happened. To my way of thinking, home seems like a logical place to go when one needs to regroup.

Peter decides to go fishing, and others agree to go with him. Maybe they'd given up hope and returned to their former lives. Maybe they just wanted the comfort of something familiar. Maybe they simply needed food. If that's true, they're in trouble, because they haven't caught anything. They fish all night long, and have nothing to show for their labors in the morning, which is when a stranger on shore suggests they cast the nets out on the other side. We know the stranger is Jesus, but they don't know that—which, by the way, seems to be a theme in post-resurrection stories. Nobody ever seems to recognize the risen Christ in their midst initially.

But that begs the question: why do they follow this stranger's instructions? Again, who knows. Maybe they figure, 'oh what the heck, let's humor him'. But several commentators noted that there's a place near the city of Tiberias where several hot springs dump out into the Sea, and that sometimes it was easier to see from the shore the churning water marked by a big school of fish, so it might well pay to take advice from the shore. All we know is that it's the huge abundance that enables them to recognize Christ in their midst. They're used to that—an abundance of wine miraculously made at a wedding in Cana, an abundance of bread from one little boy's lunch fed 5000 on a hillside. Now we've got an abundance of fish. It fits the pattern, and Peter, in typical fashion, jumps impetuously into the water and makes for the shore to meet Jesus.

The other disciples come along with the boat dragging this net full of 153 fish. Does that number matter? Maybe. Google it and you'll find theories from everyone from Augustine to Zahn about what that number means. Personally, I like Jerome's theory which dates back to the 5<sup>th</sup> century. He argued that 153 fish represents a vision of God's kingdom in that 153 is the totality of all the different kinds of fish in the world. Today, we know that there are some 34,000 species of fish in the world, but Jerome

didn't have that kind of scientific research at his disposal. But he did have a solid knowledge of Biblical Greek. There was every kind of fish, and yet, it says the net was not torn. The Greek word there is ἐσχίσθη (eschisthē), from the root word σχίζω (schizó) or schism [from *Strong's Concordance* at [https://biblehub.com/greek/strongs\\_4977.htm](https://biblehub.com/greek/strongs_4977.htm).] There was every kind, but no schism. Which, I confess, strikes a chord deep in me, given that all signs point to a schism in the United Methodist Church when General Conference convenes in ten days – a schism that is a long time coming and perhaps necessary, but is nevertheless, as much a testament to our brokenness as it is to the desire of many remaining United Methodist to en flesh the Kingdom for all God's different people.

Another thing I can't help but notice here in this passage "...is the description of Peter's strength. When Peter realized it was Jesus on the shore, he dove in and swam as fast as he could. That left six disciples back in the boat. The catch of fish was so big they couldn't haul it into the boat, so they just drug it, along with the boat as they took the boat to shore and tied up at the dock. But notice when Jesus says bring me some fish, Peter heads to the boat, grabs the whole net full of fish and drags it ashore himself. [from "Breakfast On The Beach" by Billy D. Strayhorn, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com).] 153 fish in that net. Even if they're little fish, just 4 or 5 pounds, we're talking 600 or 700 pounds of fish that Peter drags in by himself. Which seems to suggest that Peter had quite the physique to go with that impetuous nature. His weakness isn't his body, that's for sure. No, his weakness is within. For when he gets to shore, water-logged, heaving breaths, his stomach tight with emotion, that is when Peter smells the smoke of a charcoal fire.

Does that detail matter? Well, the last time Peter smelled the smoke of a charcoal fire, he was standing in the courtyard of the high priest the night before Jesus was crucified. He was with a crowd of other soldiers and servants warming himself while Jesus was being interrogated. "Lord, even if all these others desert you, I will not!" he had promised just that night at dinner. But in the span of just a couple of hours, when push really comes to shove and the stakes are high; when he has the chance to stand by his Lord, Peter says instead:

I am not one of his disciples.

I don't follow him.

I don't even know him.

Is it any wonder that Peter carries a burden of guilt? I wonder what that's like for him? Jesus looked him in the eye and renamed him Simon Peter, stating that he was the rock upon which Jesus would build his church. That's how Peter got his name. I wonder if he doubts it now. I'm no rock, he thinks. I'm no use. I'm no good. I blew it. When it mattered, I denied my God. How can I ever be trusted again? So maybe he goes back to fishing, thinking that's all he's good for now. But even then, surely he remembers how, three years earlier, Jesus called him right there by the sea and said "from now on, you'll fish for people." Peter can't escape his failures, and I'm almost certain Jesus knows it. Which is why Jesus sits him down and puts the questions to him again, three times: Simon, son of John, do you love me? Jesus doesn't doubt him. But if Peter is going to be who he's called to be, then Jesus has to get him past it. And how does he do that? No more fishing - not for fish, not for people. This isn't a mixed metaphor. This is an intentional redirection. You're a new man with a new calling, Peter. Shepherd. Feed the little ones – the young, the vulnerable, the frightened. Tend the flock. Nourish my people. Do you love me, Peter? Yes, Lord. Then get back on your feet. I don't hold your past against you. I've entrusted the work of the kingdom to you. You are a shepherd of Israel. It's time to move on.

"The story is told about Olympic speed-skater Dan Jansen, who fell twice during the 1988 Olympics. He had trained so hard and was so demoralized that he thought about giving up altogether. But on the advice a friend, Dan sought out sports psychologist Dr. Jim Loehr, who helped him find a new balance

between his sport and his life. He also helped Jansen learn to focus on the mental aspects of skating. Dan also sought out a new coach, Peter Mueller, who put him through workouts that Dan would later described as the "toughest I have ever known." But by the time the 1994 Olympics arrived, Jansen had more confidence than ever. He had set a five-hundred-meter world record just two months earlier, and he was favored to win gold in that event.

"Unfortunately, Jansen fell again during the five-hundred-meter race. He was disappointed, of course, but even more, he was shaken. But, Dr. Loehrer immediately advised him to start preparing for the one-thousand-meter race. He said, the five-hundred-meter race is gone. Put it behind you. Unfortunately, the thousand-meter race was Jansen's weakest event. However, there was no other chance for him to receive a medal. It was that, or go home. Dan Jansen stunned the world in 1994 when he won the one-thousand-meter race, and did it in record time. Since Jansen had followed the wisdom of his coach, he had put his failure behind him and tried something new.

"We can play it safe and remain secure in what we know. Like the fishermen, our lives will remain in the darkness until we are willing to follow and move in a new direction. Jesus called Peter to something that would not only give purpose and meaning to his life, but would change the world. [3 ¶]s adapted from "Try Something New" by Keith Wagner, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com).] So Peter put failure behind him. He let Jesus make him new.

Friends, what Jesus does for Peter, he does for us as well. This is not just a nice story from the recesses of history. John ends his gospel by making clear that the Risen Christ resurrects us as well. All of us have moments of denial and betrayal and failure, if not with our words, then certainly with our behavior. This doesn't seem to phase Jesus. He is the Risen Lord of new beginnings and fresh starts, of redirected callings and revamped opportunities. He gives belonging and purpose. He calls us to bring and to feed. He calls us to en flesh the Kingdom of God here and now. And he makes us Whole.

We started with mixed metaphors. But we must never forget that our mission is to bring people to Jesus and feed them. Fish. Shepherd. When it comes to faith, it's the same basic mission. Love. Jesus wants to know: do you love me? Jesus loves and died for the whole world. Will you welcome the whole world? The Whole net? The whole kettle of fish? Do you love me, he still asks? Who you bring to the table, who you feed, who you accept, who reach out to – that's your answer. Make it a good one. Amen.