

Sermon Reading: John 21:1-14

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: ² Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ³ “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.

⁴ Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

⁵ He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?”

“No,” they answered.

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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. ⁸ The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. ⁹ When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

¹⁰ Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you have just caught.”¹¹ So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord.¹³ Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Sermon Theme: Get Away with Jesus

You ever want to get away? You might remember those Southwest Airline commercials. Something horribly embarrassing or cringe-worthy happens and the narrator asks: “Wanna get away? Southwest Airlines offers...” Even if you haven’t seen that commercial you know how it goes. You do something embarrassing and your face goes red, feel the immediate hot sweats, prickly itching, and the last thing you want to do is stay in that situation.

You ever want to get away? Obviously it’s not just after an embarrassing situation we might feel this way. A conversation that just won’t end but you are stuck. Family is fighting again but you can’t do anything about it. You screwed something up at work and you know it’s your fault. Or you simply need a change of scenery or pace and want to get away from certain people and responsibilities. I’m fairly confident that every one of us has had a situation where we just want to get away whether that’s for a vacation or just a few precious moments. But when you do, do you remember to bring Jesus with you?

Jesus had told the disciples to meet him in Galilee, and so here they are waiting for him in John 21. At this particular time 7 of the disciples were together—Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathaniel, James, John, and two others who are not named. Peter decides he wants to go fishing. Maybe it was because they had time to spare waiting for Jesus. Maybe he wanted to take his mind off of things and needed a break. Maybe he was looking to earn a little extra cash—he was a fisherman by trade before he became a follower of Jesus. Maybe he just wanted to do something that was familiar and comfortable for him. From what we read here, there doesn't really seem to be anything wrong with what Peter wants to do. So whatever the reason for “why,” they decide to get away and go fishing. And they fish all night. It's not hard to imagine they spent that time enjoying each other's company, getting away to relax for a little bit, had some good laughs, maybe some deep conversations. But by the end of the night they catch nothing. Just as the day is breaking—and probably feeling a little frustrated with how the night turned out—they hear a voice call out to them. **Friends, haven't you any fish?** (Thanks for the reminder) **No**, they answered. And then this seemingly random guy tells them to throw their nets to the other side of the boat and then they would find something.

Really? Seriously? It must have been in the way that this was said because don't you think they tried that trick throughout the night...maybe even as a joke? Was it really going to make that big of difference? Who is this guy anyway? Who does he think he is to tell these experienced fisherman how to do their job? The truth is they didn't know who was talking to them so they also didn't know what was going to happen. But they listen and catch so many fish that they can't haul in the nets.

Like the disciples there's much that we don't know. I don't know why someone got sick again or they are back in the hospital. I don't know how the surgery is going to end up. I don't know why exactly they keep acting that way. I really don't know whether or not tomorrow is actually going to be better. There's so much we don't know. Jesus doesn't jump out and say how he is ruling, only that he is. He doesn't always clearly explain how he will work things out for our good, only promises that he will. He doesn't give us signs in the wind or come to us in our dreams to tell you what you should do next, but he still guides. All too often we get caught looking for a specific thing—get that job promotion, heal this sickness, fix this relationship, give me that answer—but then fail to recognize all the other blessings that he gives around us. He gives us signs so that we do know something.

After that huge catch, John—the disciple whom Jesus loved—recognizes who that man on the shore was: **“It is the Lord!”** he says. As soon as Peter hears John he wraps his outer garment around himself, jumps in the water, and swims to shore. It's almost like Peter couldn't get to Jesus quickly enough!

When we recognize God's work in our life, the new man or woman of faith leaps out and runs after him. We say things like, "Thank the Lord," when the test comes back with good news. Our hearts sing songs of praise when those plans we make actually go the way we want. Even with uncertainty for the future, when there's so much we don't know, from the other blessings in our life and him speaking to us in His Word we know He is the Lord. And so we want to be with him.

When the disciples reach the shore there's a fire, some fish already are cooking on it, and a nice of side of bread waiting for them. But before getting too distracted with breakfast, Jesus draws their attention back to their nets. He tells them to bring up the fish and start sorting. These are not tiny little fish in the net that they should release back into the water. There are 153 large fish in the net, but even with so many the net did not tear. In other words, the net should have but didn't.

No one dares to ask it because they already know. It's not just their teacher Jesus. Jesus reassures them a third time he is the almighty, miracle-working, compassionate and loving God. Jesus knew his disciples needed more reassurance even when they had went to meet him in Galilee. It's not hard to imagine those disciples continued struggles with doubts about the resurrection and what it meant for them and their future work. So even when they are getting away for a bit, Jesus wants them to know: He is the Lord and he is here for them.

How often does that desire to get away stem from deeply buried guilt or doubt? Responsibilities of life and expectations of others can weigh you down, give you unnecessary guilt, because you recognize you can't do it all. The list of "should-of's" and "could-of's" along with all the promises that you would do something becomes so long that you don't know where to even start.

Guilt can push you away from God. It can come from you knowing how you have not always been faithful to your calling as a parent, a spouse, a child, your job, as a child of God. Or you know those others times when you have outright disobeyed God simply because you wanted to. It might come from the guilt of a hidden sin that you keep falling into; one you know you shouldn't do but keep finding yourself committing. And the guilt can get to the point where you might wonder whether or not God can forgive you again. And so you drive yourself away from him, His Word, and his promises.

How often do you allow life to drive you away from him? Those same responsibilities and expectations seem so important right now that you let it take the place of personal bible study time and devotional life. Chasing after the comforts of this world, comfort in your relationships, momentary happiness pulls you away from the comfort that God gives you in his Word and being with God's people in worship. Is it because you don't know how you are going to make up for that time, your energy, your money you spend with him? Are you not

trusting the Lord to provide for you? You probably wouldn't come out and say you didn't need God right now in your life, but do your actions and your thoughts say something differently?

Notice how Jesus doesn't scold the disciples for going fishing and getting away; in fact he gives them an incredible and miraculous catch of fish. He doesn't want you to feel guilty for going on vacation, taking a break, finding some relaxing time. He would do that himself from time to time. But getting away becomes a sin when it pulls you away from God. Then that has become the thing that you fear, love, and trust more than him. Jesus wants you to see that without him your life is emptier than those nets before he gave the disciples that great catch of fish.

And so he does for you as he did for Peter and those other disciples: he reveals himself so that you know and are assured. The deep canyon of sin that was between you and God was so wide and so deep that there was no way you could cross it on your own. Jesus bridges the gap with his perfect life and death on the cross so that you are at one with the Father. We couldn't even begin to pay for even one sin. So the Lamb Jesus was slain, sacrificed once-and-for-all to pay the entire debt of all sin to forgive you personally. So now you have a changed status before God: guilt-free and sin-free. Had Christ, who was slain not burst from the three day prison of his tomb, our faith would be in vain. Our hope would be empty. You would know nothing and have nothing to assure you. But now Christ is arisen. Away with sin and sorrow, Christ lives and God gives you the victory through Jesus Christ. Away burdens of guilt and shame, Christ claimed it from you and has sprung to live so that you have no guilt in life. Death has lost its chill because Jesus has crossed over from death to life and gives you eternal life with him. This same Jesus has been given the name above every name and sits on the throne ruling over all for you and me. So when life seems like everything is out of control, know he is Lord who is always in control. When there is so much we don't know, know Jesus is Lord.

It's that same Lord who comes to you in power through His Word. You hear his voice speaking through his called servant, Jesus assures you of his promises, and sends his Spirit to work within you. Your Lord Jesus is with you in Sacrament where you receive his living body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins. He shows himself to you as he continues to bless you with all you need in life. Do not despair that you have fallen, praise God because forgiveness has risen from the grave. Praise him with your serving of him and serving your neighbor. Getting away with Jesus doesn't mean you can only be studying your bible and singing hymns. It's understanding that knowing Jesus is Lord affects everything you think, say, and do because he is the top priority in our lives. It's believing you always need him and he is always with you. Take your vacations, take time for yourself, take time to relax, and get away with Jesus continuing to grow with him. Amen.