

Listening and Responding
A Sermon by Rev. Frances Savill
Sunday May 1, 2022

John 21:1-25

Our scripture from John's gospel begins with the disciples who are together. They have seen the risen Lord, they know Jesus is alive, but they aren't certain yet what they are to do.

Where do fisherman go to think and sort things out?

They go fishing.

Peter said; "I'm going fishing."

The others piped up; "we'll go with you."

Hopefully they got a lot of good praying and thinking and talking in because they didn't catch anything.

As I think about the disciples out there on the water, I imagine their conversation must have been quite animated. Jesus had appeared to them, twice to most of them. He was alive – he spoke words of peace to them – comforting them. What joy to be together again. Their sorrow was turned to rejoicing. New hope, new excitement was awakened in them.

I'm sure the boat was full of "remember when" stories.

Remember when Jesus taught and the blind man was healed...

Remember when we went to that town of Samaritans, with that woman, and all the others... who would have believed what happened...

Remember that wedding... where was it again... oh ya, Cana, Mary was there.

Did you ever taste wine like that?

No longer were they hiding behind closed doors – but what to do first...They laughed and fished and talked and shared long into the night. By morning they still hadn't caught anything, not that that had really been the point. On the shore a stranger called to them "cast your nets on the other side."

It couldn't hurt, sometimes from the shore a shoal of fish could be spotted that wasn't visible from in the boat, but when they cast their nets on the other side a sign, a miracle, happened. The nets became filled with fish, almost more fish than they could handle.

It was the Master.

The disciple whom Jesus loved was the first to figure it out- as soon as he told Peter, Peter knew he was right. Peter jumped out of the boat and swam to shore. It was the Lord. The others worked at getting the net, the fish, and the boat to shore, and brought the catch to Jesus.

Jesus had once called them away from their nets to make them "fishers of men." This was Jesus' third resurrection appearance. It brings the story of the disciples almost to full circle.

Years before a stranger, a teacher, Jesus, had called them and they left their nets and followed him. Peter was still as impetuous as ever- he once stepped out of a boat in stormy waters to walk on the waves to Jesus. In this story he's out of the boat again, completely oblivious to the water, his eyes fixed on the Lord. But these disciples were not the same men as they were those years ago. They had followed Jesus for three years, heard all his teaching, watched him heal the blind, the lame, and raise the dead. They had watched Jesus die, and had seen him alive again.

If this scene with Jesus seems to bring them back to the beginning – it was a new beginning – the disciples weren't being commissioned to follow so much as they were being commissioned to lead. No longer were they beginning students, but from then on they were to teach others to follow.

They were still disciples, followers of Jesus, but their new commissioning was as witnesses, and to do as Jesus did. This passage has long been seen as a parable for the church. We are to reach out and cast our nets wide to bring people to Christ. Like the disciples, the church is in the business of fishing for people.

Sometimes we need to do what the disciples did and cast our nets on the other side. If what we are doing is not giving us the catch of fish we want, then we need to make some adjustments and do some things differently. But just casting our nets any old place or even any new place isn't the best idea.

We need to listen to the voice of our risen Lord, and respond by casting our nets as he directs us.

But notice, first, what happens is often totally unexpected.

After fishing all night and catching absolutely nothing, there is no way the disciples expected what happened next. Second, the catch of fish was miraculous; the work of Jesus. The disciples didn't suddenly become better fishermen. Rather, they obeyed Jesus, Jesus blessed their efforts, and there was a miraculous catch.

It is the same with the church. The Lord builds the house. The blessing becomes possible when we listen first to Jesus' voice, obey what he asks us to do, and then wait to be surprised by the power of the risen Lord at work in our midst.

Now you might be wondering, are there any guarantees that when we step out in faith that God will bless us with a miraculous catch? The answer, of course, is no. There are no guarantees in things of faith. Faith takes faith. Certainly it could have happened that the disciples cast their nets on the other side and still they caught nothing.

But consider this, if the disciples hadn't listened to Jesus, if they hadn't taken the chance and cast their nets on the other side, they would not have recognized the Lord. They would have missed seeing Jesus.

I want to consider for just a moment the ending of this passage; the charge Peter was given, the commission of all disciples – Peter, and those who have come after him.

Jesus links love of him with service.

Simon son of John, do you love me?

Yes, Lord. you know I love you.

Feed my lambs.

Simon, son of John do you love me?

Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.

Tend my sheep.

Simon, son of John do you love me?

Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you.

Feed my sheep.

Loving our Lord, calls us to look outside these walls to care and invite, to tend and to feed Jesus' people.

Our reaching out is not because we want to grow this church, or pay the bills, or have the legacy of Calvin Church continue.

We reach out because we have said;

Lord, you know everything.

You know that we love you.

Jesus has asked us to go and care and feed and bless and tend to his people.

As we come to the Lord's table to, we wait and listen, then we follow and obey.

Thanks be to God.