

Casting A Wide Net

John 21:1-14

Cradock Presbyterian Church

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How do you know where to fish? Any of you who have an avid fisherman or - woman in your family know that that can be a hard thing to figure out. So most of us have favorite spots, “the fishing hole,” something like that. It’s our “go-to” place, our place of comfort for fishing. Put us in a new place, and without knowing anything new, we aren’t going to do well; we’ll be like Peter and his crew were that morning.

Yeah, Peter and his crew had fished all night. Funny thing about that; why weren’t they out *preaching*? That’s what they’d been doing with Jesus for the past three years; you’d think they would be carrying the news about Jesus far and wide. But no – Peter and the others had gone back to Galilee. Galilee!? Why would you want to go back to that backwater, especially after the bright lights of Jerusalem? And yeah, it is Galilee; “Sea of Tiberias” is just another name for the Sea of Galilee. I think it’s because Galilee was their place of comfort. Galilee was their “go-to” place, and not just for fishing. It was home. After all the trauma of Jesus’ death and resurrection, you can’t blame them for wanting to go home.

But you have to wonder: is this a turning away, a turning back? You know that Peter was a fisherman before he got called by Jesus. Had he given up his new profession – evangelist – and gone back to his old one? Not only that, but he took the other disciples there with him! We know that a few of the others were also fishermen, but our passage says he took some people who weren’t fishermen with him on the boat. It’s a symbol of what might have been happening already: they were willing to follow Peter away from the mission Jesus had called them to do.

So they went out in the boat, and spent a long time, several hours, fishing. Understand, this isn't fishing like we do for recreation, you know, with a rod and a reel. This was net-fishing. It meant they were throwing these large circular nets out away from the boat, and then hauling them back through the water and up into the boat. That's hard work! – even if you weren't hauling in any fish. You'd guess that Peter had taken them to one of his "fishing holes," some place he was familiar with, a place where he had had success before. They didn't have those electronic "fish finders" in their day, so that's what you did. You went with what worked before.

Well, John tells us that they fished all night, and didn't catch a thing. All that work with those nets, and yet – nothing. My first thought was, "Well, why were they fishing at night? Isn't the day better?" Turns out that they fished a lot at night in those days, probably because of the heat, maybe because of the wind. The wind usually dies down at night. Fishing around in the dark doesn't seem like that good of an idea to me. I'd want at least a *chance* to maybe see something in the water to guide my fishing. So, on their own they worked really hard, and had nothing to show for it.

They must have decided to head on in, because John tells us that they were a little more than a hundred yards from shore. The dawn was just breaking and the light was very dim. As they were looking ahead to where they would probably land the boat, they saw a figure standing on the shore. The figure shouted out to them: "Hey boys! You catch anything?" When they shouted back "No!" the voice shouted back again. "Well then cast your net on the other side of the boat, and you'll catch a bunch!"

Don't you hate know-it-alls? People who show up at the last second and criticize? I bet at least a couple of the disciples were wondering, "Who is this clown? We fish all night, and right when we get to the shore, where the water is shallow and there won't be any fish, he's telling us to cast our net!" But there must have been something about this figure. They did as he told them – and it was as if their whole night's worth of hard labor got rewarded right there at the end! There were so many fish they had trouble managing such a huge catch.

And then it hit the one disciple, the "one whom Jesus loved," the one John tells us was the only one who stayed near Jesus as he was dying on the cross. He shouted out, "It is the Lord!" It must have caught on with the others, and especially Peter. He did a minimum of preparation, and then dived into the water, and *swam* ahead of the others to the shore, to Jesus. I've heard it said that it was dumb of Peter to do that, he'd have gotten there faster if he'd have stayed in the boat. No, those boats were incredibly slow, and those on the boat would still have to exit into at least some shallow water when the boat came ashore. Peter wanted to get to his Lord as fast as he could.

And get this: even with the crew short one man – *Peter*, who was busy swimming in – the rest of the crew managed to get the net in without it breaking, without losing even one fish. Make no mistake, it was a *miraculous* catch of fish, for lots of reasons. You don't see lots of fish near shore, if any; and they were *large* fish, which you only catch further out. The Lord was the power behind this catch; and it happened because his *people* followed his directions.

We, too, are under the Lord's direction to cast our nets, and bring what we catch to him. I think sometimes we forget that we have the ultimate "fish finder," our Lord Jesus. We know where to cast our nets, too, because he's given us directions in his book, the Bible. We just have to drop enough of our pride to cast our nets where *he* directs, not where we're used to. Look, I'm sure Peter and the boys didn't take too kindly to some guy on the shore giving them advice after they'd been the ones working hard all night. But when they took Jesus' advice, they had a catch they'd have never imagined. It was a far better catch than from Peter's "place of comfort," his familiar "fishing hole."

I'm reminded, too, that where Peter and his crew were casting about in darkness, they had success when they finally cast their nets in the light – the new dawn breaking upon the earth, and the new day that had just begun under our Lord.

So I think we can confidently cast our nets, and be prepared for a better catch than we ever imagined. If we follow our Lord's lead, then we'll get to share in the rejoicing at the success of the catch. Jesus had the fire ready and some of the food already prepared, because he wanted to celebrate with those disciples. Can you imagine how much he'll celebrate with us, when we bring our nets to him?