

*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 the net on 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 of the quantity of fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon 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, but 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 and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.*

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

A young man and woman make their vows before God and to one another, and then walk down the aisle to begin a new stage in their lives as husband and wife. After a romantic getaway, and a few months of settling in together, they suddenly realize that the honeymoon is over. They start to wonder, "now what?"

A student spends years of study getting ready for one particular day—graduation day. Once that day has come, the routine of classes and study gives way to both a time of hope and a time of trepidation. Now it is out into the world, and the responsibility of finding a job. More than a few students have wondered, "now what?"

We, as a congregation, have just celebrated 50 years of ministry together. We have rejoiced in what God has accomplished, but in our rapidly changing world, so often filled with spiritual indifference, we may look to the days before us and wonder, "now what?"

That question may have been going through the minds of the disciples in the days after the resurrection of the Lord. It wasn't that they doubted the resurrection. They had seen the risen Christ on several occasions. They knew that this event changed everything in their lives, but maybe they weren't sure of all that it meant for them in the days ahead. Maybe they started to wonder—more than a little bit—"now what?"

The risen Lord comes to the disciples to remind them once again of the call that He had given them at the very beginning of His ministry. In the miraculous catch of fish, they are taken back to the day when, at the Lord's bidding, they let down their nets for another miraculous catch. On that day, Jesus called them to be fishers of men. Now, in a virtual repeat of that miracle, He reminds them of the work that He sends them to do in His name. The resurrected Lord comes to His disciples to assure them, and to bless them with His forgiveness and with strength for the work that lies before them. He shows them once again that God's work, done in God's way will never lack God's supply.

In the promises that Easter brings, we have the same assurance as those disciples. We look at the resurrection and all it holds for our lives. We know that Jesus died to take away our sins. We know that He rose, and that we will live in Him. But now what? Is it just about our security for the future—or does the risen Lord have something in mind for His redeemed people?

This sermon today comes out of the sermon I preached to the pastors of our circuit on Wednesday. I told them that I am a Christmas junkie—I love my decorations and the tree and the music. I'm a Christmas junkie, but I am an Easter person. All the people of God are Easter people. Easter and its message of the resurrection isn't just a celebration—it is the basis and fulness of life for us in Christ. The resurrection assures us that Jesus is God, and that everything Jesus says to us is true. It assures us

that God has accepted the sacrifice of His Son as payment for the sins of the whole world. It assures us that we have life with Christ—the life we live here, and the life we will have with Him forever in heaven. We are Easter people. Our life as a congregation, and our lives as individuals are different because we are alive in the living Christ.

But what does it mean for us to be alive in Christ? In our text today, Peter tells some of the other disciples, ***“I am going fishing.”*** Commentators have loved to debate the meaning behind that. Some have suggested that Peter has lost faith in the mission of the Messiah, and that it was just too hard to go on with the uncertainty of the future and the hatred they felt from others as disciples of Christ. But they had to do something, so Peter wanted to return to the work he knew well—that of fishing. Others say that Peter was just looking for something to do; that he was getting cabin fever, so to speak. It may simply have been a pragmatic reality of life—fishing was a job, and it put food on the table. Regardless of the reason, there were seven disciples who went out that night to fish: Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, John and two others who aren’t named.

After a night of fruitless labour, we are told: ***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 the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.”*** Compelled by the word of the Lord, even if they didn’t realize it was the Lord, the fishermen let down their nets—and the nets are filled with large fish, 153 in total. But the fish are secondary. What really matters is the awakening that suddenly takes place in the disciples. It is John who quickly says, ***“It is the Lord!”*** Now Peter can’t wait for the boat to get to shore. He jumps in and swims to meet the Lord, with the boat not far behind him.

When they arrive, they see that Jesus already has a charcoal fire with fish and bread set out for a breakfast. They add a bit of the freshly caught fish, and spend time with the risen Lord. I am sure that the conversation would have included references to the first time this miracle impressed Peter, Andrew, James and John. This miracle affirmed once again the mission that God has for His church—that they are to be fishers of men, and that the living Saviour will continue to go with them to bless their work to His glory. He will provide for them, strengthen them and bless them.

Each week, as we come to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord, we are assured again of the forgiveness of the Lord, who gave His life for us. Even though we have done so many things to deny Him, Jesus comes and assure us that He has taken away our sins and that we have life in His name. But that great catechism question comes to our minds: “what does this mean”? What happens now, that Jesus lives? What does that mean for us in all that we have before us in our lives? What does it mean for our life as His church?

Let’s think again of that celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the congregation. As we look back, we see years of growth and excitement. But ministry seems to be harder today. Growth isn’t happening the same way. We see some of the disappointments, too. It took more than 20 years for us to decide what God was or was not calling us to do with a northwest mission. I know there have been hurts and disappointments over the years, related to the on and off efforts of the Loving Saviour mission. There is grief, even now, in knowing it has ended. Add to that all the things happening in our church as a whole. We’re worried about what the restructuring of synod may mean for our congregations. We are hurt, angry, disappointed over the district CEF collapse. I’ve heard more than a few people wonder if there will even be a church, a district or a synod in the days ahead. How can the church survive in a world that really does hate us; that really thinks we are naive and ignorant, because we believe the bible, when it is so obvious to many, who are even more sceptical than Thomas, that the bible is just out of touch with the real world, where we are wiser and know better than God does. In the face of all this, we may wonder, “Now what?”

The resurrected Lord, who served His church through His death and resurrection, has an answer for us. We look at our text, and see how Jesus still serves His people, providing them with all they need. When the fishermen caught nothing on their own, and were tired after their fruitless night, they were probably just in the process of calling it quits. But then Jesus encourages them: ***“Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.”*** Now, with the Lord’s blessings, they haul in the largest catch of their life. When they get to shore, they find that Jesus has prepared a meal for them already. He cares about them. He provides for them. He shows them that He still has plans for them, but that He will also be with them in all they do.

The living Lord still has plans for His church. In these post-Easter days, we know that the Lord still sends us with that good news of forgiveness and life. Even when what we have to say is unpopular, we have to be like the disciples, who found the same resistance to the truth of God. Even so, we are told ***“And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.”*** (Acts 5:42, ESV) The disciples who sat with the risen Lord on that beach so long ago did go forth in His name to proclaim forgiveness and life for all who believe in Jesus Christ. The miraculous catch was their assurance—and ours—that He will bless the work carried out in His name. As He fed the disciples with fish and bread to

strengthen them, so He feeds us with His Word, and with His body and blood that we may be strong in His grace. He sends us to care, to share, to comfort and to encourage. He sends us to witness to His love and grace. As Easter people, we know what we do as the people of God, united with Christ in His death and resurrection. We live in Him, and we go in His name to share what we have been given. May God bless our catch to His glory! Amen.