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Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

Whenever I read the last chapters of John’s Gospel, it almost seems as if the words of our text are an afterthought. Over the past 2 weeks we have read the resurrection accounts from John’s Gospel. We see Jesus on Easter evening appear to his disciples, although Thomas wasn’t with them. We then join them the following Sunday when Thomas is with his friends and fellow apostles. Now Jesus comes to alleviate Thomas’ doubts and fear. Jesus speaks peace to all of His disciples. He gives them the peace of forgiveness for all of their sins—and the power to believe it. He bestows on them the Holy Spirit and even grants them the authority to forgive sins. They may not be ready for everything that lies before them, but they have seen Jesus. They know He is alive. Even Thomas believes it. As Jesus encourages Thomas He offers a wonderful blessing to the generations to come: *“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”* (John 20:29, ESV)

It even seems that John has brought it all together as he writes: *“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”* (John 20:30-31, ESV) Great conclusion to the sermon! Say “amen” and sit down.

Yet John doesn’t end his Gospel just yet. He has a few more things to note. In literature we refer to this as the denouement. It happens after the highpoint, after the climax, and it is where the story is all brought together. It is the time when the loose ends are tied up or any unfinished business is revealed. To a certain extent, that is what we see in John’s Gospel. Even though the glory of Christ’s resurrection is the high point, life goes on. That’s where we pick up in the Gospel today.

Luke tells us that on Easter evening, when Jesus showed Himself to His disciples, He told them: *“behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”* (Luke 24:49, ESV) That didn’t mean they were supposed to sit around, twiddling their thumbs, wondering what to do. And so John tells us: *“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.’* The disciples don’t know all that Jesus has in store for them. Still, life goes on, and I think we can understand that the disciples didn’t want to just sit and do nothing. Peter is a fisherman. That is what he knows, and it seems natural to go and do what he does best. Some of the others decide to go with him.

Our text tells us what happened: *They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.* This wasn’t the first time that these fishermen had worked without catching anything. In fact we know that at the beginning of His ministry, when Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James and John as disciples, they had a similar night. As the fisherman were cleaning their nets, Jesus suggests that they go out for a catch. Peter says to Jesus: *“Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word*

*I will let down the nets.*” (Luke 5:5, ESV) When he does, there are so many fish that the boats were close to sinking. Now we see the same event repeated: *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.*

Life goes on, but life is different when it is blessed by the Lord of forgiveness and life. The first time Peter experiences this great catch of fish at the command of the Lord he reacts with fear, falling down at Jesus’ knees and saying: *“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”* (Luke 5:8, ESV) This time he has a different reaction. When John points out that the figure they see on the beach is the Lord, Peter can’t wait to see Jesus. He jumps into the water to swim to shore, leaving the others to haul in the fish. No fear now—only excitement and joy. Life goes on, but Peter knows that his life is different because of the crucified and risen Lord. The sinful man of the past is still a sinful man. That’s one of the things John still has to deal with in the Gospel—how Jesus assures Peter, who had denied Him before the crucifixion, that he is loved and forgiven. Peter, like each and everyone of us is far from perfect. Yet we eagerly look to that Saviour who has lived and died and risen for us all. Everything is different through His love and forgiveness.

St. Paul put it this way: *“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* (Galatians 2:20, ESV)

Yes, life goes on, but it is so different for those who are in Christ Jesus. It is a life guided and directed by the fact that we aren’t the same as we were before. We are no longer slaves to sin and the devil. We are forgiven and free in Christ. We live in Him and through Him. We find His blessings in the everyday, ordinary things. He is there with us as we do our jobs. He is with us in our studies. In our house we don’t sit down to eat without first praying, “Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest; and let your gifts to us be blessed”. His presence brings peace and joy to our homes. He brings comfort in our dark moments or in the face of illness, or even as death’s dark veil draws near. Our life in Christ brings even greater joy to our celebrations. When we live each new day in His grace and seek His presence, then we find that life goes on to be the best it can be with the Lord at our side.

There is one more part to John’s denouement. Yes, life goes on, but it goes on with a purpose. After their fruitless work on the boat, Jesus advises them to throw the net on the other side. When they do, they have a marvellous catch. Again, this takes us back to the first catch like this. At that time Jesus told Peter: *“Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.”* (Luke 5:10, ESV) That can only happen by the grace and power of the Lord. It comes through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. What the disciples couldn’t do on their own, they can do in and through Christ. We are told that there were 153 large fish in the nets. This simple detail may have been the Spirit’s way of emphasizing the miracle. Of course, commentators have wondered if there were more to it than that. One of those commentators noted that Greek zoologists of the first century believed that there were 153 kinds of fish in the seas. As another pastor asked, could it be John is reminding us that we are to go to every tribe and nation with the saving Gospel, to bring all nations into God’s net? The net wasn’t torn—perhaps a reminder that none of those God has chosen for salvation will get away; none will be missed.”

Yes, life goes on, and for those who believe in the crucified and risen Christ, that life will go on for all eternity. Yet even here, in the everyday life of this world, the Lord is with us to bless us. We who have seen the Lord by faith are also eager to share that good news with others. Like John’s excited words to Peter on the boat, *“It is the Lord!”*, we also want to point others to the Lord who is life and salvation. The catch isn’t about our skill. It isn’t because of our great marketing strategy. It is about going about our business as God’s redeemed people. God gives opportunities for a great catch in our day to day lives. We have friends who come and tell us they’re hurting—and we can share with them the love and peace that Jesus brings to us. We have relatives we can invite to church. We don’t have to go door to door, although there are times that is good, too. We just live as God’s people in the office or at school, in our work and in our play. We let Jesus shine through us. We speak of Him and walk in Him. We just live with Jesus—and the Christ who lives in us by faith will work to bring others to His grace and life. Amen.