

First Lesson: Acts 9: 1-20
Second Lesson: Revelation 5: 11-14
Psalm 30
Gospel Lesson: John 21: 1-19

Third Sunday of Easter
May 1, 2022

“Your Net”

Sermon by Pastor Paul Campbell

Grace and peace to you from Him who was, who is, and who is to come. Raise your hand if you just love that hymn. [“You Have Come Down to the Lakeshore”] There are some of you who did not raise your hand. That’s OK. We all have our opinions, and that’s OK.

As is the case with a lot of the texts that we have for Lent and Easter, this is another one that takes some special attention, because it is very complicated. You probably saw a lot of themes in there. And it is something that we need to look at very carefully. So we are going to take a look at this John story. It’s the post-Resurrection fishing story, and we will look at what is in the net, literally and figuratively, for the Disciples and us – what is in our nets, our fishing nets as we go through life.

I have mentioned before that the writers of the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke came earlier, maybe one generation after Jesus. And so they may have known somebody who was an eyewitness to Jesus and what he was about. But John is much, much later; he’s around year 90, and given that a lifespan is about 35 years back in the first century we could be in the third generation removed from the actual Jesus. So it’s like John is writing for us. We don’t have that personal encounter, but we know of some of the stories.

John is also much more theological than the other three Gospels, and you will see some of this as we come through it. And he is the only one who puts the fishing story as a *post*-Resurrection event. So those are all important details. The big picture in the text is the redemption and the reconciliation and the relationship of all humanity. All humanity is in this action, Jesus is reconciling himself to all of us, or more precisely all of us to Him, and his glory.

But the writer of John isn’t an intellectual, he’s just reporting a story. He turns the corner for humanity as we know it. It is much more, and much more the truth; it is inspecting what is in the net, besides the fish. So we are going to take a look at some of those details. One that we are *not* going to look at is why Peter was naked in the boat – another story, another sermon, but you can go wherever you want with that. So, the number three is big in this story, and we are going to do a little decoding here because John, like I said, hides a lot of these things very carefully. In this fishing story, Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves him. So when was the last time there were three questions asked between Peter and Jesus? It was at his Crucifixion. So this is not an accident.

John, again being very theological, is paralleling these three events, and after Peter says he loves him, then Jesus says “Take care of my sheep; take care of my people.” Get over yourself Peter, be a leader, be a leader. So in addition to some of these things the big setting of this is crucial. The Disciples were fishing; these disciples were fishing before they knew it was Jesus. They were fishermen, not very good ones, evidently, but they were fishermen. And so now Jesus says, “Feed my sheep.”

But what they were talking about is not what Jesus had them do at the time of the Crucifixion, and the encounters after that. He said be my Disciples, be my evangelists, go out and tell the world about the love that comes from God. So what do they do? None of that; and they go back to their previous profession,

fishing. And again, not very well, but that's what they knew. They did not do what Jesus had asked them to do. They went right back to their old life.

And another bizarre theme is that the Disciples did not recognize Jesus standing on the beach. What is with these guys? They walked with Him for three years and more, and they do not recognize Him. They were seriously deficient in their faith. So this is more theology from John.

Based on the conversations I had in the narthex this morning, and yesterday in the service, I'm guessing some of you are going to trade in heat for mosquitos. Good luck with that. But I can relate to that, and I also can relate to catching no fish. For three years Donna and I owned a little place out of Chetek, Wisconsin, on Prairie Lake. We bought a garage, and Donna reconfigured it and it became what we called our "Cabita", like a casita, small house, but cabita, small cabin. And we had a little bedroom, and we had a little seating area, and we had a little kitchen. It was great. And the highlight always was when our three grandchildren would come over from the Twin Cities and we would go fishing.

We had a very good friend across the road, and he had a nice pontoon that he let us use whenever we wanted. So we got in this pontoon, and the three boys and I would go out on the lake. We would find some place where they weren't skiing, or jet skiing or any of those other things, just a nice quiet place. Then I would spend the rest of the time baiting the hooks. The nightcrawlers that we had in town had a sense of what was going to be happening in their life, and when I tried to teach the boys how to bait the hook there was more pain involved than fishing, so I went ahead and baited them. And then I spent the next time after we threw the lines in untangling the reels, trying to get the rods in and the seaweed off the hooks, and all of that. So that was all part of the experience.

Then we would take a break. Donna had made nice treats, and sandwiches and, you know, drinks, and we sat around and talked. We told stories; we talked about baseball, all the things that are important. Then we decided, well, there's fish in town, we can go to the café and get some real fresh fish. Let's just go back. So we pattered back with no fish in the bucket, and the boys were a little disappointed for about three minutes. Then they started throwing balls over the Cabita into the woods, that I would have to go get and then fight off the mosquitos. That was their entertainment.

We would build a campfire. Jesus was there in spirit around our campfire, and we would tell more stories.

So I've come to the conclusion that for me fishing is not about catching fish, it's about relationships. It's about filling up the net with personal relationships. It's about understanding where everyone is. Because Jesus, on the threshold of this whole scene, says to the Disciples, "Children, you have no fish." Children, a term of endearment. This is where that reconciliation, this is where that relationship comes full circle all the way around. These are the people, especially Peter, who were instrumental in His death, and now he says, "You are my children. You have no fish, let me help you." It's a term of endearment. He looks past their ignorance, past their betrayal, and sin, and loves them. Jesus provides the fish, then he set up the campfire, then he made dinner. Jesus not only filled their nets, but he filled their hearts. And he went full circle, saying all that is behind us, I forgive you. Compassion, redemption, and reconciliation, for all of humanity. For all of us. So this story is about relationships, and feeding Jesus' sheep, and that is all of us.

So if you catch that trophy walleye, good for you. I never have, so I'm leaving it for you. Go for it. But remember that this whole story is about what is really important in the net. It's that relationship, that love. Our catch, our nets, are full of God's love as shown through Jesus. Feed your sheep, feed your friends, feed your family with love and your nets will always be full. And that's the good news. Amen.