

Famous First Words: Let's Eat

John 21:1-14

A Real Fish Story

Anyone who has ever fished has a fish story. My story is that I'm not much of a fisherman. I have gone fishing a number of times in a lot of different settings and really haven't caught that much.

You and I both know that when it comes to fish stories, the more the story is told the fish have a way of getting bigger and bigger.

While on a youth retreat some years ago, a number of us went fishing. I remember putting the line in the water and soon caught what was surely the smallest fish on record. Everyone had a good laugh.

Not to be undone, I decided to record the event with a photograph. I stood holding my rod and reel, while one of the young people strategically held the fish closer to the camera. The effort was to make the fish look bigger than it was. In the end, the fish still looked small and I looked like a goofball.

The fish story we read about today in John 21 is no fish story at all. There's no exaggeration, just the account of a miraculous catch.

In fact, there is painstaking detail, even down to the number of fish caught. There were exactly 153 fish caught that day, not 152, not 154, but 153.

Fish were not the only ones caught that day, but so were a group of Christ's disciples.

The Story Is This

The Gospel of John seems to stop and then start again between chapters 20 and 21. This lends truth to the notion that there is always one more fish story to tell.

You can't read John 21 without getting a sense that the gospel "*begins again.*" It does so with another post-resurrection appearance.

John never tired of telling stories about Christ's resurrection. Those stories offered hope to the early church, just as they offer hope to us today. We need to tell those stories over and over again and not just on Easter Sunday morning as we are wont to do.

In regard to John 21:1-14, we find Jesus appearing to his disciples while they were out fishing. As we'll see, he not only provided for their physical needs, but their spiritual needs as well.

The backline of the story is this: The disciples were huddled together still trying to make sense of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

In the mix of that Peter, refusing to just sit around, so he decided to go to work. As you know, Peter was a fisherman by trade.

For some, work has a way of taking their minds off of things, particularly when it comes to grief.

I know when I am particularly burdened, I am prone to launch headlong into some project. I realize though, just as you have, you can only hide for so long.

Peter wasn't alone in his heading to work. Thomas, Nathaniel, James, and John also joined him. Together they headed out into the dark of night.

It was not unusual for fisherman to fish at night. They fished when the fish were running.

It was also not unusual for fisherman to troll just off shore.

Moreover, it was not at all uncommon for those fishing to have someone on shore to help direct them.

Coming Up Empty

The scripture reports that these fishermen didn't have much luck, that is, until Jesus came along.

Calling out from shore, "*Friends, have you caught anything?*" "*Not a thing,*" they replied.

There's nothing more frustrating than fishing and not catching anything. As I mentioned a second ago, I'm the king when it comes to coming up empty when fishing is concerned.

I even took part in a fishing expedition to the Florida Everglades a few years back. My buddies and I took an air boat way back into the Everglades. The promise was that there would be plenty of fish, guaranteed. We didn't catch a thing. We did see a lot of alligators.

I've often wondered about the statement, "*A bad day fishing is better than a good day at work any time.*"

I'm not sure about that.

Staying at It

Let's face it, every now and then we're going to come up empty. Plans don't always pan out. Dreams don't always come to fruition. Things don't always go as we thought they would.

Sometimes coming up empty can have financial impact. Other times it can leave us embarrassed. Still other times it can leave us bewildered and angry.

That shouldn't keep us from staying at it. We never get anywhere, if we don't try. You'll never catch the first fish, if you don't put your hook in the water.

You know what they say, "*Nothing ventured. Nothing gained.*"

Thomas Edison failed hundreds of times before he struck on just the right filament for the incandescent light bulb. He viewed those so-called "*failures*" as nothing more than steps along the journey toward success. Coming up empty didn't deter him for a second.

Our son, Brian, has done a lot of research in his day and is getting set to do some more. Some of that has been slow and painstaking. On more than one occasion, he's been quick to say that what he's been working on didn't work out.

Christ wants us to stay at it, particularly when it comes to "*fishing*" for people.

No Success Until Jesus Came Along

The redemptive note here is that Jesus stands in the midst of our frustrations to offer leadership and direction.

"*Cast your net on the right side of the boat,*" he said. Now, that's a *Famous First Word* if there ever was one.

Christ could see what the disciples couldn't see, just as Christ can see what we can't.

His viewpoint is always different than ours. That's why it is always good to listen for Christ's voice. That's why it's always good to seek his direction in the midst of whatever it is you are trying to do.

Such may very well mean that we too will need to fish on the other side of the boat. We too will need to shift what **we're** doing in order to do things Christ's way. We need to be responsive to Christ's direction, allowing him to have his way.

The disciples did just what they were told to do and the catch was enormous. In fact, their nets were so full that they were about to burst.

The disciples wouldn't have caught the first fish had they not heeded Christ's direction.

Just like us, they didn't have to do what Jesus instructed them to do. They could have kept on doing things their own way. They could have very easily given up.

The disciples though obeyed and because of that their haul was enormous.

Obedience always puts us in the care of the One who not only loves us, but seeks to provide as well.

Jesus, in his instruction, wanted to teach his disciples about that provision and how that provision was tied to them following him.

Jesus had risen from the dead, after all, and his power was not just over death, but over the everyday occurrences of life.

We would do well to remember that as we meet the everyday occurrences of our lives. The risen Christ is with us.

About Peter's Response AND Ours

It's interesting to note that at first, the disciples failed to recognize Jesus. The darkness probably had something to do with that. A lack of expectation did as well.

John was the first to recognize Jesus. "*It's the Lord,*" he said.

Upon hearing that Peter wrapped himself in his outer garment, dove into the water, and swam to Jesus. That excitement would serve him well later on as he would offer leadership to the church.

How excited are you about Christ's presence in your life? Do you notice him or is your focus on other things?

Christ Stands Ready to Provide

Once on shore, Peter, along with the rest of the disciples, saw that Jesus was cooking some fish on an open fire. He even had some bread for good measure. He was making breakfast for them.

I don't know about you, but for me breakfast is usually the lightest and quickest meal of the day. To have a real breakfast, like the ones served during holidays or on vacation, is a real treat. On those occasions breakfast immediately becomes the best meal of the day.

Some nutritionists say that breakfast is the most important meal of the day, particularly for children.

That's why the free breakfast offered at schools to those who qualify is so important. Those children are able to learn much better on a full stomach.

I get the feeling that was the case for the disciples, particularly given the One who was serving them.

Jesus knew that that simple meal offered there on the seashore would go a long way toward his disciples learning about his provision.

Grand Slam Breakfast

When you hear the words "*grand slam*," what do you think of? Maybe a home run with the bases loaded.

When you are really hungry and you hear the words, "*grand slam*," what do you think of? Why the *Grand Slam Breakfast* at Denny's—two eggs, sausage or bacon, hash browns, and a stack of pancakes.

When Denny's has offered its *Grand Slam Breakfast* for free, lines stretch out the door.

In our own hunger, our spiritual hunger, let's know the risen Christ stands to teach us. He stands ready to guide and direct. He stands to provide.

It's up to us to respond to all of that obediently with faith.

Let's eat then. The risen Christ is in our midst and wants to feed us.