

Third Sunday of Easter - May 5, 2019, Year C  
**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 21:1-14

***"Fishing for People"***

Have you even been in a situation where you were unsure of what to do next? You want to go this way; you want to go that way. You know Yogi Berra said, 'when you get to the fork in the road – take it!' Wisdom, I think? Sometimes your head says, 'do this' and your heart says, 'so that.' Your emotions had been spent – because they have been on a roller coaster – grief, sadness, sudden joy, confusion and then the question: now what? Have you ever been there? I think each one of us have been there. The Apostles remembered the message from the angel in Mark 16:7 *"go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you."* That was at the empty tomb on Easter Sunday. With that in mind, after they saw Him, they returned to the Galilee. If nothing else – these guys were obedient. This was their comfortable place, their homes – and waited. While there they returned to the thing they knew best – fishing on the Sea of Galilee, also known as the Sea of Tiberius, as well as other names. Today's Gospel tells us who the players were; there were *"Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee (Nathanael was also known as Bartholomew – Bar (son of) Tolome), the sons of Zebedee (John and James), and two other disciples."* (John 21:2) As we have discussed many times in the past – fishermen did their work at night, since the fish were attracted to the light that they used.

So here are the Apostles after working all night and coming up empty – met by someone – quite a ways away on the shore, who calls them "children" and tells them to go back out and cast their net on the right side of the boat. We are not told whether or not they remembered the first time that Jesus told them to go back out – but we do know that the results are the same – sort of. There is a difference this time! This time – Jesus is not in the boat – He is telling them to do it themselves – and to drop their nets off the right side of the boat. This is very important – and is often missed. You see, the Sea of Galilee is in the shape of an ancient harp – and you can verify this on any map. The Apostles were fishing off the top left hand or north western shore – north of Tiberius, near the place where Jesus preached His Sermon on the Mount, and ironically near the site of the feeding of the 5,000. This place is called Tabgha – meaning Seven Springs, and it is near the place where the fishermen were called to be Apostles, not far from Capernaum. Tabgha is an area that the Apostles knew as close to home – and is significant in the life of the church. This northwestern and western shore were thought to be "Jewish" waters and when you would go onto the lake to fish you would point the boat north – fishing off the left-hand side of the boat – the Jewish side of the boat. The eastern shore was the 'goyam' or Gentile side of the boat, where the Decapolis was, and on that shore Jesus drove the "legion" of demons into the swine. Swine – or pigs could not live near Jews and only have a place living in pagan Gentile lands. For Jesus to be telling the Apostles to throw their nets off the right side of the boat – pointing north – would be considered Gentile waters – and the fish would be considered Gentile fish. Do you see the significance of the Risen Jesus directing the Apostles, preparing them for ministry, so that now, as fishers of men – they would catch the Gentiles

into their nets? Not just the Jews! They took in quite a haul of fish! By the direction of Jesus Christ - the Kingdom of God now was open to everyone – Jew and Gentile!

When the Apostles headed for shore with their large catch, it was then that Peter recognized Jesus – and jumped from the boat toward his waiting Lord. The other Apostles brought the boat in and followed, arriving to find that Jesus had already prepared a fire and had cooked fish and bread. Fish and bread- the very same meal that fed 5,000 people, was awaiting the followers of Jesus. Fish and bread; a meal provided by Jesus – without the help of the Apostles – that had to have come from the same heavenly source as that famous multiplied meal.

Jesus greeted the Apostles and asked them to “*Bring some of the fish you have just caught.*” *Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn.*” (John 21:10-11) Is there something significant about the number 153? There have been debates over this for ages – but the fact remains that it was a large number – much larger than all of them could eat – and they were large fish. So why does the Apostle John use the number 153? I would suffice it to say that this was an event that needed to be reported with detailed accuracy, and rather than reporting 150 or 200 fish – instead was reported as exactly 153 and it meant that it was precisely as it happened – and the followers of Christ would need to hear the message associated with it – and then the message that immediately followed it.

We as Christians sometimes get the impression that we have got to do it all. How many of us imagine that God is waiting passively for us to initiate things? If we don't organize it, it won't get done! If we don't tell people the Good News of Jesus Christ- they won't hear it! If we don't change the world – it won't get changed. There is the train of thought that we need to be His hands. Well, may I suggest to you that God doesn't need our hands – after all it was His hands that made the sun rise this morning. It was His hands that created the world with just a word. He doesn't need our hands, but He gratefully accepts them, as we come alongside Him in ministry.

God does not need us to do anything for Him – He is quite capable of creating a universe, but He welcomes the efforts of those that He loves and honors and blesses those efforts – for they glorify Him. Jesus doesn't need the Apostles' fish – but He invites them to bring their catch alongside the ones that He has prepared. He asks them to work alongside Him. As when this time Jesus told them to go out and cast the net and He was not in the boat like in Luke 5:4-8. Listen to these words of the first time that Jesus told them to throw out the nets: “*When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."* *Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."* *When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me,*

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*Lord; I am a sinful man!*” This time their efforts brought in the catch that Jesus designed for them, and so it is in ministry – Jesus sends us out – to do the work He has given us to do (do those words sound familiar?) – that He has designed for us to do – things to do, people to come in contact with, and He blesses us and guides us all the while. I might add that they had to be thinking that so much of what was happening seemed very familiar to them. Have you ever had that happen to you? You go someplace and you feel that you have been there before, or you meet someone and you say to yourself ‘I know them’ or I have met them – they seem so familiar. That must have been racing through their heard – they know they have been to this place before – they grew up near here. What happened here? Jesus fed 5,000. What happened here today – He fed them with bread and fish. Amazing! God loves to do that, having something happen at the same place – several times. Just read your Bible – read Scripture. God has an intricate way of weaving things so that we relate to it.

We are called to work hard for Jesus. We are supposed to be organized – and there is no excuse for laziness, sloppiness or halfhearted effort in God’s Kingdom. If it is God’s work that we are doing – then we must do it with all of our might – and strive to do excellence in the process. That is what I believe this message is about. Jesus calls each one of us into ministry in His Name. Remember His words “*you did not choose Me, but I chose you.*” (John 15:16) Called to come alongside Him, and just like the Apostles that day. I am reminded of the adage: “Give a man a fish and he’ll eat for a day, but teach that man to fish and he’ll be fed for a lifetime”

While today’s Gospel message might end with the meal – the story doesn’t and the “message after” that I spoke about a few moments ago needs to be told. Remember the first time Jesus sent the Apostles out to cast their nets? Peter fell on his face and declared himself a sinner. Now the second time the Lord sent them out – Peter is burdened with the weight of his sin. “I don’t know Him, I never knew Him, I don’t know Him.” That was the three times that he denied Him. That is a burden to him. Flash back to John 13 when Peter insists loudly and publicly that he will remain loyal to Jesus. He is not going to let Jesus down – and wants to follow Him wherever He goes. Peter said to Jesus “*Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.*” In chapter 18 we see Peter try and fail in the Garden of Gethsemane. He draws his sword and cuts off the ear of Malchus, one of the Temple guards – only to have Jesus restore the ear. Later in that chapter we see Peter, who followed Jesus, who is now in custody, to the courtyard, where he denied Jesus three times, just as the Lord had told him he would. It all began around a charcoal fire in the courtyard – as they gathered to stay warm. Peter left that courtyard cold and angry with himself, ashamed at what he had done to Jesus – and that Jesus knew. How many times do we commit as sin, and figure – God won’t know. WRONG! God is there; He witnesses it; He sees it. He wants to hear from us that we are sorry and we ask for forgiveness. And now, right after today’s Holy Gospel, Jesus restored him three times, like the three times he denied the Lord – asking him “Peter do you love Me?” three times and restoring him with his answers. He turns Peter from a fisherman into a shepherd.

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Forgiven and restored. The first one out of the boat – had been forgiven, restored and renewed. This same sinner who humbled himself before the Lord Jesus Christ, would indeed, along with the others be filled with the Holy Spirit and power on the Day of Pentecost – just as Jesus had said in the upper room. This same Peter would be the one who Jesus called to boldly come alongside Him in ministry and address the crowds on the Day of Pentecost – sharing the His Gospel; the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As it says in the Second Chapter of Acts: “*So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*” (Acts 2:41) We are blessed every time we add a soul to the Body of Christ. I just think of yesterday, and I have to add this. Many of you are on Facebook, and some are not, but Jay Spivey, who was baptized yesterday, early yesterday afternoon, posted his Baptismal certificate, and said “I feel like a new man!” Praise the Lord. I have seen a transformation of that man. As his mom and dad sat in the first pew, they witnessed this young man be transformed, be blessed, be changed, and be received into the Body of Christ. Anointed and washed. Amazing!

Just as Jesus invited Jay to join the Body of Christ, Jesus invites each one of us, today, who have been baptized to come alongside Him.

- He welcomes your efforts;
- He welcomes your ministry; that doesn't mean you are going to wear a collar; it means you are a part of the Body of Christ.
- He welcomes your witness of His love that others will see in you.

There is an old song that many of you know – “we are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord” The Chorus – “and they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love, and they'll know we are Christians by our love.”

He wants you to come alongside Him – fishing for people.