



[Pastor Josiah Fitch](#)

**Sermon for Easter 3**

May 1, 2022

# Are We Fishers of Men, or Just Gone Fishing?

**John 21:1–19**

*Alleluia! He is risen! In the Name of the Father, and of the † Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

In our Gospel reading, it's been a few weeks now since Jesus rose from the dead, and appeared to His disciples. Last Sunday, Jesus came and appeared to them a 2nd time, on that occasion especially to bring Thomas to repent of his unbelief & confess his faith. Today Jesus appears to the disciples for a 3rd time-to at least 7 of them - this time back in Galilee, the home base for many of the disciples.

Jesus appears to them unexpectedly while they're out on the lake in a boat fishing, Jesus standing on the shore by a charcoal fire He had made. They don't recognize that it's Jesus there on the shore, but He calls to them, and that's when the fun begins.

Here's how it came about. The boys are back home in Galilee, by the Sea of Tiberias, the Sea of Galilee-although, as a "sea," it's really more of a glorified lake. Here the disciples are, kind of biding their time, while they're waiting for further instructions from their risen Lord about what to do with their lives. In the meantime, they do what they know best: put a little food on the table, go back-at least temporarily-to their previous line of work as professional fishermen. "I am going fishing," Simon Peter declares, and this does not mean just sitting in a boat for a couple of hours with rod, reel & cooler of beer. No, when Peter and the boys go fishing, they go fishing! Remember they're commercial fishermen, so they haul out the net & get in a boat big enough for the 7 of them, and they're out fishing all night, in waters they know like the back of their hand. But of course, they work all night, and they don't catch a thing. Some nights are like that, I suppose, in the fishing business. So, it's easy to imagine that they're tired, they're exhausted, they're frustrated.

By now it's dawn, very early in the morning, and, lo & behold, some guy is standing on the shore. They can't make out who it is. They're out on the lake about a football field away from shore. The man on the beach calls out to them across the water: "Children, do you have any fish?" In other words, "Didja catch anything?" They answer, "No." So this guy answers back: "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." What, are you kidding me? We've just been working all night, using all our skills & know-how, and we've come up empty handed! Don't you think we know what we're doing? We're pros at this, buddy! Who are you to give us advice on fishing? Who do you think you are?

Well, whether it was something in this guy's voice or just out of "what could it hurt"



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desperation, they give it one last try before packing it in. They cast the net where he says, and-boom!-a net full of fish! I mean, a whole bunch, lots & lots of large fish.

By the way, this big catch made such an impression on the fishermen that John even records the number here in his gospel: 153 large fish! That's a haul! Now if John were writing this in Revelation, we might be inclined to search for symbolic meaning in the #153. But as it is, I think the 153 here is just to emphasize what a big catch it was. Professional fishermen would likely take inventory of their catches, so noting the number may not have been unusual. So I think #153 is just the "net total," if you will.

So the disciples put in their net, as the man said, and-bam!-there's this big catch of fish. Suddenly bells go off for one of the guys, Ding!-the light bulb pops on, he puts 2+2 together, and comes up with who this mystery man must be: "It's the Lord!" John cries. With that, Peter, eager to see Jesus, dives right in the water & swims to shore.

Following in the boat, the rest of the guys drag in the net. They get on shore, and see Jesus there by the charcoal fire, and-surprise!-he's already got some fish of His own on the fire. How did He get those fish? And He's got some bread. He invites them to eat. By now all sorts of bells should be going off. Remember the feeding of the 5000, when Jesus multiplied the loaves & fish? Yes, this Jesus is the Lord of creation, the eternal Son of God, by whom all the fish in the sea and all the grains of the earth were created in the 1st place.

Yet we disciples ought to also remember when Jesus provided a previous miraculous catch of fish. Peter especially ought to remember that one. It was early on in his following Jesus. On that occasion, likewise, Jesus told Peter to let down his nets for a catch, and he told him that he had toiled all night & caught nothing. But at Jesus' word Peter did as he was told, and pulled in a large number of fish. "Depart from me, Lord," Peter said then, "for I am a sinful man." And Jesus told him, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." In effect, "You're fishermen, but I'm gonna make you Fishers of men."

But that was then; this is now. Much has happened in between. Like Peter denying his Lord-3 times!-on that night just a few weeks back, the same night he so proudly declared that even if all the others should deny/desert Jesus, he never would. Yet, just a little while later. . . The garden, the arrest, and then following to the courtyard, and. . . "I am not one of his disciples!" & "I don't know what you're talking about!" & "I tell you, I don't know the man!" 3 times denying Jesus in that courtyard, there by that charcoal fire!

Now the bells are really going off! You see, on the night when Peter denied Jesus, he was standing there, warming himself by a charcoal fire.

Now, here he is again, standing by a charcoal fire. In fact, the Greek word for "charcoal fire," "anthrakia," only occurs 2 times in the whole New Testament: 1st in the courtyard of Peter's denial in John 18, and again here in John 21 on the shore with Jesus & Peter standing together by this charcoal fire.

If it seems like Jesus may have done this for a reason, it becomes ever clearer with



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what happens next. 3 times Peter had denied his Lord by a charcoal fire. Now, 3 times Jesus will restore His denying disciple by a charcoal fire.

"Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." "Feed my lambs." "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." "Tend my sheep." "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

Yes, Simon Peter, your 3 denials have been forgiven 3 times over. Your sins are forgiven, you are being restored to your position, and you'll have some good work to do now, Peter, which the Lord will bless. For some things have happened in between: In between 2 charcoal fires, 1 in the courtyard & 1 on the shore; In between Peter's denials & Peter's restoration; In between, Jesus has gone to the cross, where He, the Son of God, purchased forgiveness- for Peter, for you, for me, for all.

Jesus has been our "in between" guy, the mediator, the man in the middle making peace between God and sinful man by His holy blood, shed on our behalf. This is how Jesus can forgive Peter's denials-and every one of ours. Risen from the dead-very early in the morning, "just as day was breaking"-our resurrected Lord Jesus still stands by His charcoal fire, calling His denying & deserting disciples to come to Him to be forgiven & restored.

So, how about you? How have you denied your Lord? Or are you thinking you're better than Peter? I've been just like Peter, too many times, denying Christ by my words & actions, surrendering to the pressures of my flesh & the world. Denying Him also by my failures to speak & by my inactions. Like Simon Peter, you & I have denied our Lord Jesus more times than we can count. Some in particular may stand out in our minds & memory, like those times in the courtyard did for Peter.

But the good news today is this: Jesus is calling you & all people to Himself, through His cross, death, & resurrection! Hear His voice, come & receive your forgiveness. Jesus is restoring you today. No matter how many times you have fallen, Jesus will pick you up. He is restoring you to Himself, and He has some good work for you to do, which He will bless.

You see, Jesus has called all believers to be fishers, not of fish, but of people! You & I are forgiven & saved today in Christ Jesus, fed & nourished, and sent out to go fishing. To go out into our homes, workplaces, and community; to go Fishing-that is-seeking those who do not know Him. If that scares you, remember when Simon Peter & his fellow fishermen set out to fish on their own. How well did it work? A big 'ole goose egg. Yes Jesus sends us out, but He has given us the net of His Word with which to Fish! On top of that, Jesus is also the one who puts the fish in the net! All He calls you & I to do is cast the net- to Speak His Word in humility as saved sinners - as beggars seeking to point other beggars to the place they can find food & shelter, forgiveness & salvation. Trust in Jesus; Listen to His voice. Even on days when you're tired & have caught nothing, listen to Jesus' voice and cast the net again. Speak of what Jesus has done for you & the hope you have



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in Him.

Have those heart to heart conversations with your children, your family & friends. If they don't understand why you come to church, why you believe, tell them! If they don't hear who Jesus is, how will they know Him? Invite them to come with you to hear His Word, Sing His Praise, Receive His gifts! You are not alone in your faith; Jesus is with us, and we are in this faith & Church together to strengthen & help one another! So share Jesus with others, remembering what Jesus says "I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

He promises to bless whatever He is calling you to do in His name, according to your vocation, your place in life-in church, at home, at work, in your family, in our community.

And Jesus has something to give you, to give you strength as you go out to serve in His name. Children, do you have anything to eat? Yes, you do. Jesus has it already laid out for you. It is His holy Body & Blood, given for you to eat & to drink in His Blessed Sacrament. Come & eat; go & share. Come & be forgiven; go & forgive. Come & be restored; go & seek the restoration of others. For You know that Jesus loves you, and you know that He loves them too. Jesus is with us always, just as He promises! He will never leave us, nor forsake us, and the charcoal fire of forgiveness is still burning. Alleluia! Christ is risen!

*To God be the glory both now and forever,*

*In the Name of the Father, and of the † Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*