

# “Gone Fishing”

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John 21: 1-19

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A man went ice fishing one afternoon. He cut a hole in the ice, put his line down, and waited. Soon he heard a loud voice say, “There are no fish here!” Startled, he looked around but did not see anyone, so he continued fishing. Soon, he heard the voice a second time exclaim even louder, “There are no fish here!” Again, he quickly scoured his surroundings, but still he saw no one. And again he focused his concentration on catching fish from the hole he had cut in the ice. After a short period he heard the voice a third time. “There are no fish here!” With great care and concern he slowly looked up and with his voice shaking from fright said “God? Is that you?” The voice rang back immediately. “No! This is the rink manager. There are no fish here!”

“Gone Fishing.” It’s such a classic sign that says so much. Whether we like fishing or not; we all have days when we’d like to hang that sign on the door of our house, our workplace, or simply hang it around our neck. ‘I’m not here, I’m not working, do not disturb me, don’t bother me’. I’d like to hang a ‘Gone Fishing’ sign on this pandemic.

Well Peter had hung the *Gone Fishing* sign on his heart a little while after the resurrection. Now of course Peter actually fished for a living, that is until he met Jesus on the beach 3 years before, and he had been challenged to fish for people. Oh, he probably still fished a little, but after he met Jesus, he no longer knew or defined himself as a fisherman. Now he was a disciple of Jesus.

After meeting Jesus, the thing that gave his life meaning was not how many fish he caught or didn’t catch in a night, but rather what he was learning from the master about the Kingdom of God as Jesus healed and taught and offered hope to so many people.

But so much had happened since those days. Jesus had been arrested and tortured and killed. Peter who had said, and still believed, that he would die for Jesus, had let him down so badly—denying he even knew Jesus 3 times—that he couldn’t stand the sight of his own shadow. All of that was more than enough, but it was far from all: Jesus had come back to life. Mary witnessed it first and then Jesus had appeared to all of them twice. You can imagine how his head must have been spinning. What does this mean? What is going on? They had been down into the deepest

darkest valley and then three days later, with the resurrection, they had been on top of the mountain. But they couldn't stay there. You can't stay in the valley and you can't stay on top of the mountain.

It was in the middle of this roller coaster ride that Peter said "Enough of this. I'm going fishing...anyone coming with me?" It was probably music to their ears. *Fishing...now that was normal! That was something they knew how to do. Nothing too strange could happen fishing.*

They go back to their old way of life. Fishing represents their old self—the people they were before Jesus called them to follow and changed their lives. What is your old way of life? Perhaps your old way of life is a perfectionist, or someone who cares too much about what others think. Perhaps your old way of life blames everyone else for your problems or is filled with guilt and self-loathing.

Frankly I'm sure that at that point Peter was ready to just permanently nail that "Gone Fishing" sign on the door of his life and cover up for good the sign underneath that read:

### **Peter    The Rock    Disciple of Jesus**

Maybe you've had times in your life when you've wanted to close the door on your faith in Jesus and just say "enough of this". I'm done. But God has a way of opening that door again, even if it's just a crack.

So now, poor Peter goes back to his old life, to his default setting. I can imagine how good the boat felt and how comforting it smelled and how good and familiar it was to hold the nets. He was sure it would be a good night.

I don't know if it was Murphy's Law, I think something deeper was going on, but that night doesn't quite work out the way he planned. Why? The fish don't bite. They don't catch a single stupid perch. Finally, as the sun is coming up, they give up. Pretty depressing. Then to add insult to injury, some guy on the beach asks if they caught anything. The only thing worse than not catching any fish is having to tell the world you didn't catch any fish.

And then (I love this part) the guy on the beach says "Drop your nets on right side of the boat". This is a hilarious and curious scene. Like what a strange thing to say! As if dropping the net on *other* side of the boat is going to change the world. It's ridiculous.

The whole point of going fishing was that this was something that *they* could do. They might not be amazing disciples without Jesus but they could fish without Jesus! They didn't need Jesus to fish or did they?

At that point they had a pretty important decision to make. Do they think about it and decide not to bother, or go with their gut and just do it?

There were other times when Jesus had asked them to do something that made no sense whatsoever—remember when they fed 5,000 people?

I don't know about you, but I like to understand what is going on before I act. I'm not big on blind obedience. And yet, if you are at all serious about following Jesus, at some point you've got to be ready to give up control and trust even if it doesn't make a lot of sense.

C.S. Lewis once said, "In the end there are two kinds of people: those who say to God "Thy will be done" and those to whom God says "Thy will be done".

Whose will is controlling your life, yours or God's?

Well Peter and the rest decide to trust and obey one more time. They just do what he says and then what happens? The net is so full it almost breaks. It turns out there's no going back. They can't even fish without Jesus.

I want to pause for a commercial break. In the last couple of weeks I've discovered a wonderful television series about the life of Jesus. It's



called "The Chosen". It is not on Netflix or Prime or Crave or any of those streaming services. Instead it is an independent production. If you watch on a smart phone or tablet you can download the app: "The Chosen" for free or you can google it and

watch it on your computer. It really makes these Gospel stories come alive.

On the beach, the risen Lord feeds his weary and wonder-filled disciples with barbecued fish and bread. And then he turns specifically to Peter and they have that incredible verbal exchange. "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." "Feed my sheep."

I can't help but notice the questions that Jesus didn't ask. He didn't ask "Are you up for a challenge?" He didn't ask, "Are you finally finished fishing?" He didn't ask, "Do you think you're *ready* to be a disciple?" He didn't ask, "Do you think you now have the right skills and qualifications for being a disciple?" He didn't ask, "Are you good with people?" He didn't even ask, "Do you love my sheep?" The only thing he asked was, "Do you love me?"

Peter was called to serve, not because he was qualified or had the right spiritual gifts, but because he answered 'Yes, I love you'.

It seems that the only two qualifications for being a follower of Jesus are 1. That you love Jesus and 2. That you are willing to trust him so completely you're willing to give up the controls, give up fishing and begin something new.

Do you love me? That is a question that Jesus asked Peter, but it's also a question that he's asking you today. Do you love me? I can tell you without a question of a doubt that Jesus loves you. He loves you as much as he loved Peter, his Rock. He's probably got a nickname for you too.

When Peter said "Lord you know I love you" Jesus' answer to him is "Feed my sheep". Our love for Jesus is always tied to his world and his precious and lost and hurting people. However you can, however you feel you are called, reach out to people. In these pandemic times it might be picking up the phone and calling someone to find out how they are doing.

I know that we have a need for a grief support group for widows. Maybe you are called to lead or organize that?

Maybe it is sending a card or calling when you think of someone and letting them know you care. Perhaps it is committing to praying for people and situations in the world. There are a million ways to serve. Don't get overwhelmed by the possibilities or the need, just follow that nudge in your gut, even if it makes no sense, follow that nudge, reach out in love. As you do, say a simple prayer like "Jesus be with me... as I write this letter, lend a hand or a listening ear". 'Jesus be with me' and then just do it. Just reach out.

In a funny way when we serve, we can still hang the sign outside the door that says "Gone Fishing". Because like Peter whom Jesus challenged to fish for people, we too will be changed, but remain the same person all at the same time. Somehow Jesus takes who we are and wonderfully transforms us to make a difference and bring more love to the world just the right way that only we can.

So, let's go fishing! The truth is fishing alone is no fun at all, but when we go fishing with Jesus, our nets are full, our joy is incredible and our stories are as big as the fish.

Thanks be to God.