

Wall Street United Church

May 4th 2025

John 21:1-21:19 NIV

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered.

He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, but even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!”

I don't know about you, but I love a good magic show! Can you remember the first magician that you saw that impressed you? When I was young, my cousin wanted to be a magician. And he definitely became quite a good one, entertaining all over North America and on cruise ships. But I remember, as a kid, him doing the same tricks over and over again. After a while they weren't so impressive ... but then he did bigger and better tricks, even sawing people in half and escaping from solid containers! You may have seen him — he was the fire-breathing guy on the early KFC Hot Wings commercials. The tricks were impressive at first, but we eventually learned how he did them. The tricks became completely explainable. (Still impressive, but explainable!) As I read the passage for today, I was reminded of the miracles that Jesus performed. Some people call them tricks, but really they were indeed miracles. Miracles are those things that happen because of the involvement of the divine — things that can't be explained without the power of God.

When I first re-read this story in preparation for today, I was confused, as the story sounded somewhat familiar. Did Jesus really do this — a **'catch lots of fish miracle'** twice? And as I researched, indeed he did! You may remember that when Jesus was first calling his disciples, he invited everyday people, including fishermen, to join him. Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John were all fishermen who Jesus called to become 'fishers of humanity'. As the first story goes, Jesus went out in a boat with them one day after they had not caught any fish, and he encouraged them to try again. This time, their nets came up loaded with fish! Fast forward to today's story..... I wonder if the disciples remembered this early encounter when they were out fishing this time? I imagine they were missing Jesus. They had spent so much time together, and such cool and amazing things

happened when he was around. Why did he have to go? Were they wishing Jesus would come by to hang out with them and help them catch fish as he once did?

As we look at today's scripture, it opens early one morning, not long after Jesus's resurrection. The disciples, without Jesus around, have bailed on their task to be healing the sick and talking about Jesus. Rather, feeling lost and purposeless perhaps, the disciples have returned to doing what they did best, what they knew best — fishing. Feeling a little bit lost, but hanging out with his friends the night before, Simon Peter says “Hey, let's go do something. Let's go fishing!” They just wanted to be doing something together. They felt so lost without their leader. So out they went to catch some fish ... but by day break, they still had not caught any. Again, I wonder, did they recall the first time Jesus helped them catch so many fish? Discouraged, and thinking it was soon time to go ashore, a voice breaks out through the fog — “*Hey, did you catch any fish?*” There was not a “*Yes, this big!*” but rather a heads down. “No, we haven't”. Isn't this what they were trained to do? How could they have no fish?

And so the story goes —Jesus invites them to throw their nets on the other side of the boat. Hesitantly, the disciples respond to the invitation to try something different, something that didn't really make sense... and they threw their nets on the other side of the boat only to have them overflow with fish —153 to be exact! It all happened in Kairos time / God's time! At this point, did one of the men recall the invitation from the first time this happened... “Throw your nets out again”! There is nothing like a good movie sequel!

By now, I imagine the disciples have become aware of the fact that this is not just anyone out for a morning walk on the beach, but rather it was the resurrected Jesus who called out to them. This is the third time, without warning, since his resurrection that Jesus made himself known to the disciples. Being so excited that this was Jesus, Peter's response was to jump out of the boat, grab his clothes and rush to shore to be with Jesus. (An interesting reaction for a guy who denied him three times not long before).

The rest of the disciples were not far behind. Although they were excited by all the fish they caught, I imagine they were also a little cold and hungry. And so, Jesus extends the 2nd invitation to the disciples — and this is my favourite invitation.

“Come and join me for breakfast! I have a fire going, there is some fish and some bread.” He has everything they need for breakfast, but He also says to them, (and perhaps this is where the idea of potluck meals comes from!), “bring some fish, bring what you have, and come and eat with me!”

Do you ever hesitate to invite someone over because there is so much to do? Sometimes it feels like entertaining has to be complicated, and I am guilty of needing to do it all sometimes, but the example here is, as Jesus says, “Keep it simple. Just bring what you can and join me to hang out in community. I want to spend time with you.”

Now we pause for a public service announcement! I am so grateful for the amazing breakfast program we run here. For the Sunday Suppers, for Fundraisers, for Yuletide Fair cooks, for Lenten lunch soup makers, for all those who help with Coffee Time and Saturday lunches, funerals, and so much more. Sorry if I missed a specific group! Through our food ministry programs we invite people week after week to come, and eat and share in fellowship. We are the hands and feet of Jesus in this community. Thank you to all who help with our food ministries: Ann & Joan, you and your teams do an amazing job! Thank you everyone who shares a coffee and eats what is put out! Thanks to all who contribute to the food ministry budget. Hospitality is alive and well at Wall Street.

Finally, after extending a radical invitation to trust him by throwing the net on the other side of the boat, and a compassionate invitation to join him for breakfast, Jesus settles in and has a very intentional conversation with Peter. We don't know for sure if all of the others were listening, or if Jesus and Peter walked off together down the beach for a private conversation.

When my Dad used to take pictures, one of the things he taught me was “Get in close to your subject if you can... get in so you can really see them.” From this, I think I came up with my theory on parenting and classroom management, which is “*Connection before Correction.*” I think Jesus models this idea here. Jesus took the time to connect with his disciples before having a heavy conversation with Peter. Remember, Peter was the one who Jesus predicted would deny him three times before the rooster crowed, and sure enough that is exactly what happened.

Whenever I hear this story, I am always reminded that there are at least two ways to deal with wrong doings. 1) We can forget that Jesus loves us and that he will forgive us when we blow it — like Judas did, and it ultimately leads to death. Or 2) As Peter did — we can admit the mistakes we make, return to Jesus and continue to do as we are invited to do.... *Feed his sheep and Follow Him!* Friends, following Jesus and slowly becoming like him, leads to a transformed life, full of purpose and potential. I have no doubt that once Peter realized he had denied Jesus three times, he wondered how he could ever be useful to Jesus again. But here, Jesus restored Peter and gave him the chance to restate his love for Jesus. Jesus asked Peter three times — “*Do you love me??*” — To which he responded, “*You know I do!*” And Jesus said “**Feed My Sheep**”. He restored the relationship with Peter and invited him again to follow Him.

Jesus invites us to be in relationship with him and to feed his sheep. Still, I just want to highlight that it will not always be easy to do the right thing. The right thing will not always be where we expect it to be, or how we expect it will be done. We may end up in tough places, places where perhaps we would rather not go. Let’s look at verse 18.

“Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.”

Is this true for everyone? Maybe not, but it was prophetic for Peter as it pointed to his death as a follower of Jesus. I just don’t want to promise it will be easy as a Christian. Rather I want to highlight that as we accept the invitation to follow and become like Jesus, it might be tough, but we will be loved. We will live with purpose and we will never be alone.

I wonder and invite you to take a moment to consider:
What has Jesus invited you to do lately? My guess is there is likely more than one invitation on the table.

Has he invited you to trust him and do something that just doesn’t make sense unless it is done with His direction and in his time? To try something you have

done before, but perhaps now he is calling you to try again, this time in His power, with a little different approach — nets on the other side?

Is the Spirit inviting you to come and spend time with them? The Spirit wants to bring us peace. The Spirit longs to encourage us and reassure us of God's desire to love on us and commune with us. Come and have breakfast with Jesus, let him provide for you!

Perhaps Jesus is inviting you to *Feed his Sheep and Follow Him*. It may not be easy, but it will be worth it.

As I ask these questions of us as individuals, I also ask these questions of us as a church community. Coming out of our *Fearlessly Forward* strategic plan, and wanting to move Wall Street securely into the future, we have some invitations to consider. We are an older church. We can't stay where we have been — we need to keep taking steps to follow Jesus's invitation to trust Him, to commune with Him and to continue to feed his sheep. Thanks be to God! Amen.