

## Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

(March 18, 2018)

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### Easter, 2019 - He is Risen!!

Sermon manuscript

## Fish! Follow! Focus!

(John 21)

### Introduction: The end of the story. Followed by...

Jesus' life story is recorded in books written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. All of these books give us a progression that we find in all great literature.

We meet the *characters*. There is *action*. There is *character development* as the chapters fly by.

Then, to *action* there is added *tension* and *drama*. Then *conflict*. The conflict builds through *arguments* and *scheming* and *plots*. Finally, the Gospels all record Jesus' arrest, torture, and death.

We relived that story on Friday evening.

At the end, from the cross, Jesus cried out, ***"It is finished!"***, committed Himself to His Father, and died.<sup>1</sup> End of story.

But that isn't the end of the story because all four books go on to record the story of Jesus' burial in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.

The disciples all went back to safe places, hiding from the Jewish and Roman leadership. They were frightened, because they had followed a Leader who was killed for treason and blasphemy.

Mercifully, the Sabbath came to an end (at sundown), starting a new week.<sup>2</sup> Again, a perfect place to end the story.

But the story continues with the news of Jesus' glorious resurrection. Jesus is alive and the disciples rejoice, then and NOW. We celebrate Easter.

We did that as we just sang songs of praise. And some of us did that this morning at 6:30 out on the parking lot. We remembered some of what happened on that first Easter.

We saw how a risen Savior changed everything for a grieving Mary Magdalene, a doubting Thomas, and a guilt-ridden, quite thoroughly broken Simon Peter.

That is the Easter story, the story that tells us that the crucified Jesus is alive, and that because He is alive, we who believe in Him have hope and joy and purpose - and LIFE, abundant and eternal!<sup>3</sup>

That's what John tells us over and over again in his Gospel. It's a great story. So, resurrection ends the story.

No, the resurrection wasn't the end of the story, either.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, three out of the four gospels don't end with the noun of resurrection, but with a verb - Mission! - for those who now believe in Jesus. And this morning, we're looking at John's grand finale.

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<sup>2</sup> The Jewish reckoning of "day" begins with the start of one day's darkness and ends with the beginning of the next day's darkness. (see Genesis 1)

<sup>3</sup> John tells us that this is why He wrote the book. [*John 20:30*] ***Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; [31] but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.*** The Gospel of John is the one book in the Bible where the author explicitly tells us that he wrote it for evangelistic purposes. Of course, God can use the truth out of any portion of His Word to bring someone to faith. But John wrote what He wrote so that people who didn't believe would come to faith in Jesus and be saved.

<sup>4</sup> It wasn't for Luke, who gave us a conversation between two disciples on the road to Emmaus that ends with Jesus sending them out to reach the world for Him. And it wasn't for Matthew, who gave the disciples a great commission.

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<sup>1</sup> John 19:30.

John takes us to a beach on the Sea of Galilee. And remember. The disciples we see have all come to full-fledged faith in Jesus.

The purpose of this intensely personal interaction is not to *convince* them to believe. They believe. The point here is to *commission* them to act on the truth they have already believed.

First off, Jesus, the carpenter, gives a hilarious fishing lesson to some fishermen.

### **FISH! (vv. 2-14)**

#### **“I’m Going Fishin” (vv. 2-3)**

*Seven of eleven disciples at the nets (vv. 1-2)*

***[1] After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias,<sup>5</sup> and He manifested Himself in this way. [2] Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee (i.e. - James and John), and two others of His disciples were together.***

The whole Galilean region would have been rich with memories for all of the disciples. Galilee had been their home, with the exception of Judas Iscariot<sup>6</sup>. Galilee was where they had all met Jesus.

The gloom of Good Friday and that sad Saturday was history. But, then, too, the first blush of Easter excitement had passed. And, they were out of the pressure cooker of Jerusalem.

They were on home turf in Galilee, in a comfortable setting. There, close by the sea, Peter got a bright idea.

*The disciples got “skunked” (v. 3)*

<sup>5</sup> When John wrote his gospel, Tiberias was the ruler of the Roman Empire. The big inland lake was - at least temporarily - named after the emperor.

<sup>6</sup> Iscariot = “a man from Kerioth” a city in Judea.

#### ***[3a] Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.”***

Today, those words, “*I’m goin’ fishing*” can speak volumes. “*I’m going fishing*” is the ultimate kick back and take-it-easy phrase. “*I’m going fishing*” = “*I want to get away from it all.*”

But that’s **not** what Peter meant. Peter was a professional fisherman. For him, “*I’m going fishing*” meant, “*I’m going to work.*”

And he meant WORK. They didn’t take rods and reels and they weren’t fly fishing. They fished with heavy nets. And since fish bite better at night, they threw their nets all night long.

On this particular night, Peter and his friends had what I call “a Dave Smith fishing trip.” These experienced, Sea of Galilee pros got “skunked.” Not so much as a nibble.

***[3b]...They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing.***

I can relate. It’s been literally decades since I’ve gone fishing because I got tired of not catching fish. The good part is that my fishing trips were always very clean affairs. And I never had to carry a heavy stringer of fish.

So, I’ve shared the not-catching-fish experience of these seven disciples. I’ve never experienced anything like what came next.

#### **Fishing with Jesus (vv. 4-7)**

*A risky greeting (vv. 4-6)*

***[4] But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. [5] So Jesus said to them, “Children, you do not have any fish, do you?”***

Now, Jesus did two things here that I would never do.

First, He called the fishermen “***children.***”

When you next go to Corpus Christi and see seven rugged men coming in from a night of fishing, I do NOT recommend that you address them as “*children*.”

It’s just not a great idea. It’ll get their attention, but not in the way you hope.

Second, Jesus pointed out their unsuccessful night of fishing. Again, it is not a good idea to yell, “*Hey, I see you didn’t catch any fish!*”

It would be a big mistake for me to do that. But Jesus knows exactly what He’s doing.

Following their answer, He offered a suggestion, which is the third thing I would neither do nor recommend.

There is nothing more frustrating to fishermen, auto mechanics, athletes, or plumbers than listening to an arm-chair quarterback spout advice from the sidelines.

***[6a] And He said to them, “Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch.”***

Here is this guy on the shore telling THEM, the pros who have been out fishing all night long, how to fish.

Still (and to their credit), they took the Stranger’s advice. They probably figured, “*After all, it’s not like we will catch less fish than what we have already caught.*”

***[6b]...So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish.***

Of course, during the night, they had fished off port and starboard. But as soon as they switched sides, their “luck” changed.

And as soon as John saw the fish racing for the nets, something clicked.<sup>7</sup>

*“Hey, isn’t that Jesus?!”* (v. 7)

***[7a] Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved*** (i.e. - John) ***said to Peter, “It is the Lord.”***

So, John was the first to perceive that this catch was Jesus’ work. Peter was the first to do something about it.

***[7b]...So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea.***

Peter wanted to see Jesus and figured that the quickest way to get to Him was to swim, allowing the other six disciples to man the oars and get back to shore in the more traditional way.

### **Breakfast on the Beach (vv. 8-13)**

*The disciples arrived with their catch* (vv. 8-11)

***[8] But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish. [9] So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it<sup>8</sup>, and bread. [10] Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish which you have now caught.” [11] Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn.***

That last comment, the counting of the fish, lends an undeniable air of credibility to the story.

<sup>7</sup> Jesus had performed a similar miracle earlier, recorded in Luke 5.

<sup>8</sup> And just where did Jesus get these fish...?

There weren't "about a hundred and fifty fish." No. The count was precise to the last fish: one hundred and fifty-three.<sup>9</sup>

As they prepared to eat, John tells us in deliciously memorable words how Jesus served them breakfast.

*Jesus gave them fish and bread (v. 13)*

***[12] Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples ventured to question Him, "Who are You?" knowing that it was the Lord. [13] Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise.***

If those words sound familiar, it is because they are just about the exact same thing He said when He distributed the fish and loaves at the feeding of the five thousand. (John 6)

Jesus wanted the disciples to make a connection between what He was doing **HERE**, on the beach, with what He had done **THERE**, with the crowds.

At the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus multiplied fish and loaves and fed a crowd.

On that day He was responsible for seeing that everybody got food. He provided. The disciples' role was not provision. They were in charge of distribution. They handed out the food Jesus had provided.

Jesus was teaching them that they had to depend on His power if they were going to meet needs in His Name.

So here, with the miracle of the catch and the distribution of the fish, Jesus is driving home two lessons.

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<sup>9</sup> Some Bible scholars have suggested that "one hundred and fifty-three" stands for something, that it is symbolic. One person noted that if you add the numeric value of the Greek letters in the name "Simon" (76) to the numeric value of the Greek letters in the word "fish" (77), you get one hundred and fifty-three. Hmmm... Me? I think the point is that they caught a bunch of fish.

One, they need to depend on Him for resources.<sup>10</sup>

And that is just as true in 2019 as it was on the beach that day. Apart from Him we can do nothing. We obey. He opens doors. We obey. He is in charge of results. We obey. He changes hearts.

Two, He's telling them - and us - that "fishing" is always close to His heart.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all quote Jesus as saying something like, "*So far, you've been fishing for fish. Follow Me, and you'll catch people who will join you in following Me.*"

John is the only Gospel writer who doesn't include, "*Follow Me and I'll make you fishers of men.*" - but that's exactly what He's saying here. A big part of following Jesus involves "fishing."

Fish aren't lost at sea, and fishermen aren't doing the fish any favors by fishing. But people without Jesus are lost. And followers of Jesus are to go fishing for people who are far from God.

The primary purpose of this meeting on the beach is to foster a fishing mentality. Jesus wants us to go fishing at work, in our schools, in our neighborhoods, and at play.

And we "fish" as we share the good news that Jesus saves.

Your day-to-day world is your Sea of Galilee. That is where you gently, lovingly, toss your net. (NOT a barbed lure!!)

You serve. You look for ways to meet needs in Jesus' Name. You look for open doors to open your mouth to speak words of life.

If you know Jesus, will you open your eyes and see your friend as God sees her? She's lost at sea without God. He's in need of a Savior because of sin. He is the object of God's love and the reason Christ died.

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<sup>10</sup> As A.B. Bruce in The Training of the Twelve notes, Jesus took the disciples to the place of their greatest expertise to show them that even there - on the sea! - they needed to trust Him for results. Where will He take you?

Would you pray that God would give you open doors to tell your friend the best news they will ever hear?

By whatever means, bring your friend to Jesus who has called you to be a fisher of men and women and teens and children.

Shortly after the breakfast on the beach, we come to a second exchange, this one a conversation between Jesus and Simon Peter.

### **FOLLOW! (vv. 15-17)**

#### **Jesus and Peter: Round One (v. 15)**

***[15a] So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon<sup>11</sup>, son of John, do you love Me more than these?”<sup>12</sup>***

It was a good question. Earlier, on the night before Jesus died, he had claimed to love Jesus more than the other disciples did.

The word that the Lord used to identify the “love” He was talking about is the uniquely Christian Greek word “agape” - “*Simon, do you love Me UNCONDITIONALLY more than the others do?*”

Simon might have been surprised by the question, but his answer came quickly - with no hesitation.

***[15b] “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.”***

It’s a good response. But Peter didn’t *exactly* answer Jesus’ question.

He didn’t tell Jesus that he loved Him more than the others did. And, in answering, he didn’t use the word “agape”, but another Greek

<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting that Jesus said, “*Simon, son of John,*” and not “*Peter*” (which means “rock”) for Simon hadn’t exactly been “Rocky” lately!

<sup>12</sup> Note Mark 14:29, where Peter claimed that even if all the others fell away from Christ, he wouldn’t.

word for love, “*phileo*”, a word that speaks of the emotional, feeling side of love. It’s a love between friends.

Jesus accepts the answer, and then tells Peter, ***[15c] “Tend My lambs.”***

Peter thinks to himself, “*OK. Well that was random.*”

And we can almost see him heading back to whatever it was he was doing, when Jesus asked Peter the same question a second time.

#### **Jesus and Peter: Round Two (v. 16)**

***[16a] He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?”***

The only change in the question is that there is no comparison between Peter’s love for Jesus and the other disciples’ love for Jesus. Here, it is just an absolute question.

Simon’s answer here echoes his previous answer.

***[16b] “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.”***

To which Jesus replies, ***[16c] “Shepherd My sheep.”***

Perhaps Peter was a bit taken aback that Jesus had asked him the same question twice. He would have been undone when Jesus asked the same question a third time.

#### **Jesus and Peter: Round Three (v. 17)**

***[17a] He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?”***

Peter was pained to hear the question again.

**[17b]...Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.”<sup>13</sup>**

With that, Jesus repeated what has become by now a formula.

**[17c] “Tend My sheep.**

Peter was “*grieved*” because he could hear the rooster crowing in the background as Jesus asked the question the third time. He knows, now, that Jesus is calling him to *confession*.

But Jesus wasn’t only calling Peter to *confession*. He was also calling him to *mission*. At the end of each of the three questionings, Jesus told Peter to love, to serve, to shepherd, to fulfill his ministry.

Watch the genius of Jesus’ interaction with Peter here.

The Lord takes a man who has failed, urges him to come to grips with his failure, and then commissions him to serve.

This exchange between Jesus and Peter speaks powerfully to me, likely because I, like Peter, have failed.

*Personal, parsonel failures - and yours...*

I’ve experienced numerous failures, some of them, famously, while preaching. Here’s just one of many I could recount for you.

A few years ago, I was describing the ruling authority the apostles will have in the kingdom when Jesus reigns. The Lord told them that they would each be given a throne.

Quoting Jesus, I meant to say, “*In the coming kingdom you SHALL SIT on twelve thrones.*”

What I actually said was nothing like what Jesus said. I have since practiced saying, “*Shall sit*” diligently.

Truth be told, though, that’s a pretty easy story to tell. Other failures aren’t quite so easy to talk about.

- I could tell you of the grip pornography had on me when I was much younger.
- I could tell you of on-going battles with selfishness, ugly complaining, a tendency to worry rather than to trust.
- And I could go on and on.

I’m not proud of any of those failures. But they are all a part of my story. It’s a story God wants to redeem for His glory, just like He wanted to weave Peter’s three denials into a story of grace.

He wants to do the same with the stories of struggle in your life.

Look at Peter and join him in confession. Look to Jesus and thank Him for forgiveness. Look to the Father and ask Him to use you, again.

Seriously. God wants to use you to push His purposes forward.

Jesus’ message to you is identical to the message He gave Peter by the Sea of Galilee. Own up to your sin and confess; re-affirm your love for Him; serve Him.

Following Christ means that we repeatedly get up after we fall. And the reason we get up is to follow and to serve.

There is a false narrative out there (fake news?) that the privilege of serving Jesus is reserved for those who have arrived. Nonsense.

The pool of those who would serve Jesus is occupied only by those who are imperfect and still “on the way.”

<sup>13</sup> The great author and thinker, C.S. Lewis, said, “*On the whole, God’s love for us is a much safer subject to think about than our love for Him.*” Peter would have certainly agreed.

In fact, serving Jesus requires the self-awareness to know that we haven't arrived, the honesty to admit that we still struggle, and the willingness to make ourselves available to be used by God.

The mission of Jesus has always been carried out by flawed men and women, young people, and children.

Like me. Like you.

And the invitation Jesus makes to you on this Easter Sunday morning in San Antonio is the same one He made to Simon Peter by the Sea of Galilee two thousand years ago: Follow and serve!

And Jesus isn't quite finished with Peter or with us.

### **FOCUS (vv. 18-23)**

#### **Follow. Period. No Matter What. (vv. 18-19)**

***[18] "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." [19] Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God.***

Like most of us, Peter thought that his future would be like the past, only more so. He had always known freedom. He would always know freedom.

Jesus says, "Not so fast, Peter."

As time went on, Peter experienced the limitations of persecution, beatings, and jail time. He will eventually die a martyr's death. Church historians tell us that Peter died by crucifixion,<sup>14</sup> like Jesus did.

And, frankly, I think Peter would have been encouraged to hear this. Having failed to stand up for Jesus once, he now knows that he will grow to be a man who will be faithful to the end.

It was a painful, hopeful prophecy, followed by a charge - **[19]... And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me!"**

I saw this - follow Jesus no matter what - in the brothers and sisters in Christ I met while I was in India. Most of them serve in less than ideal settings. Most of them are opposed, at least to some degree.

Like Rakesh.

I met Rakesh, a man who leads ITP workshops in India, in the city of Delhi. Rakesh was actually leading a workshop in the Hindi language on the same week during which Paul was leading one in English in Agra.

Over a meal, he told me about his personal ministry of evangelism and disciple-making. He has made it a policy to not spend any of his time sharing in villages that already know about Jesus.

He only goes to villages where people have never heard of Jesus, establishes disciples, and then moves on to another village.

He told stories of the transformative things that happen when Jesus is introduced into a village. Shamanism, darkness, and hopelessness are replaced with light and love and joy.

Yes, he has been frequently opposed for his work, but he said, "That doesn't bother me. I just want people to know about Jesus."

Yes. I was inspired.

Hear Jesus' charge to Peter. He says the same thing to you and me, even if life is tough.

Jesus is not unsympathetic to your pain. He cares that you are facing trials and troubles and relational challenges and problems in your marriage and at work. He cares and hurts with you in your pain.

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<sup>14</sup> Some traditions tell us that Peter was crucified upside down, at his own request.

He is with you and He still says, ***“Follow Me.”***

It is as we follow Jesus while in pain that the Holy Spirit most powerfully shapes our character. Following Jesus when it is hard to follow Jesus adds extra brightness to our witness.

Peter got it. Given that, he went on to ask what many of us would consider an understandable question.

**Follow. Look to Jesus. Not to Others. (vv. 20-23)**

*“Lord, what about him?” (vv. 20-21)*

Peter looked around, saw the Apostle John behind them, and asked Jesus, **[21]...“Lord, and what about this man?”**

I think something beyond curiosity prompted Peter’s question.

Adversity is hard to bear, and it can be harder to bear if you’re the only one bearing it. (Sadly, misery really does love company.)

So, Peter wants to know, *“Is John also going to suffer?”*

Two thousand years after Peter’s question, we know that John did suffer greatly for Jesus. He endured exile on the island of Patmos for his faith, and likely, a martyr’s death.

But Jesus didn’t reveal that to Peter. In fact, Jesus didn’t respond as Peter had expected him to at all.

*“Peter, none of your business!” (vv. 22-23)*

**[22] Jesus said to him, “If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!”<sup>15</sup>**

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<sup>15</sup> [23] *Therefore this saying went out among the brethren that that disciple would not die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but only, “If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?”*

Peter was way too interested in how Jesus was going to deal with John, and too little focused on simply following.

That’s how John’s narrative of the breakfast on the beach ends, and that’s how we’re going to wrap up our time in God’s Word this Easter morning.

Jesus tells you to fish. Leave this morning with eyes wide open for opportunities to lovingly press Jesus into the lives of your friends. Don’t pay any attention to whether or not anybody else is fishing. Just focus on Jesus - and fish.

He’s called you to follow. So, despite failures, you’re going to jump into the game, serve Jesus, be “on mission” for the Great Commission, take next step with Jesus and help others do the same. Even if nobody around you, nobody in your family follows Jesus. You’re going to focus on Jesus and follow wherever He leads.

And lead He does. That’s what a living Savior does.

**HE IS RISEN!**