

*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... – John 21: 1-9*

There have been arguments galore over this story. In Luke's gospel, this happens early in Jesus' ministry. In fact, it is the action that accompanies Jesus' call of Peter. In John's gospel, however, it is a post-Resurrection occurrence and accompanies Jesus' reinstatement of Peter after his denial (see tomorrow's blog for that story!) I believe that this is not the same miracle recorded in two different places but a miracle that happened twice.

Ministry is all about the intangibles. We try to make it about nickels and noses, finances and attendance, because those are things we can measure. But any good pastor knows that what we are really accomplishing is soul-change, fellowship-building, community growth, and none of these have perceivable outcomes. So many pastors tell me that they find great joy in doing things that have a definite outcome. Mowing the lawn, catching fish, or even doing a puzzle gives us some sense of accomplishment. But this fishing trip goes beyond that.

When things don't make sense anymore, we all flow back to the familiar. Jesus, the One on whom they had pinned all their hopes and even their lives, had died, leaving them hopeless. But three days later He had appeared to them, alive again or so it seems. And now... what? Was Jesus back? Was He dead? What were they to do? Nothing made sense anymore, so they went fishing. At least 3 of these 7 were professional fishermen, so they went back to the familiar: nets, boats, waves, fish.

But even that didn't help. Distracted as they were, they couldn't catch a thing. I wonder if any of them thought of that night 3 years before when they had no luck, and then Jesus taught the fishermen how to fish. Suddenly, a figure on the shore called out to them with the old familiar words. They didn't need to throw the nets again to know that Jesus stood on the shore with a smile on His lips, recalling Himself that powerful day. But they did. And they caught a boatload of fish – literally. As they were hauling in the nets, John our author tells Peter, "It's Jesus!" and Peter, rash and bold as always, ignores the fish, jumps in the water, and swims for shore. With Jesus dead, their mission ("fishing for people" from Luke 5:10) was over. But with Jesus back, they could be about their business of fishing for people again!

Life without Jesus is purposeless and missionless, for He IS our mission and makes it possible. But life with Jesus... well, let's just say it's never dull!

When fear, hopelessness, and depression hit, what is the familiar that you go back to? Today, do you trust that Jesus is still with us, calling and empowering us to take on His mission? How are you "fishing for people" today (see Luke 5:1-10 if this doesn't make sense)?