

I'm Going Fishing

Text: Various

“Simon Peter told the disciples, ‘I’m going out to fish.’ They said, ‘We’ll go with you.’” John 21:3

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The theme for the 2018 Southeastern District Convention was, “Let’s Go Fishing,” based off of John 21:3 that reads, **“Simon Peter told the other disciples, ‘I’m going out to fish.’ They said, ‘We’ll go with you.’” (John 21:3).** You know how the story goes: the disciples go fishing and they catch nothing. Tired, frustrated, hungry, they are at that place where they are about to pack up everything and call it a day. But then Jesus comes on the scene. His response to the disciples seem to strike a nerve, both of embarrassment and frustration. Jesus says to them, **“Children, do you have any fish?”** Of course the answer is **“No.”** That is what the scriptures tell us, but I imagine, from my limited human understanding, that while their lips were saying “No,” their minds were thinking, “Do you see any fish? Does it look as if we’ve caught any?”. And Jesus knew this. He knew that they were physically spent and mentally exhausted and so He speaks words of promise to them, **“Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some” (John 21:6).** The disciples did and they caught so many fish they were not able to haul the catch into the boat.

Something similar happened this past week while Desi and Catie were at my parents’ house. Mom and dad built a house on two acres of land at a place called High Rock Lake. Their house is on the water and they have a pier out back. Now, this lake is a great lake to swim in and to travel by boat on, but my favorite part about living on the lake was fishing off their pier. Having grown up fishing off that pier my brothers and I learned where the fish were, what time of the day they would bite, and what bait worked best. Well, Desi has learned that as well. And the way it works, at least with my sweet Catie, is that if mommy is getting bites where she is at, then that is where Catie wants to be too. But Desi knew where the fish were and would always tell Catie to “fish on the other side”. And she would, and they’d both catch fish.

“Pastor, are you going to stand up there and talk to us about fishing during the sermon this morning?” Well, yes and no. You see, stories about fishing, particularly the one from the sermon text this morning, remind us of three great truths. But before we look at each truth, it’s important to understand that there is more to our text this morning than just fishermen and a boat. Simon Peter, in his comment about going out to fish, foreshadowed the calling that he would have as the first pastor of the church in

Jerusalem. Though Peter and the disciples didn't know it, Jesus' command to cast the net on the other side meant more than just physically doing it, **"You disciples, will be fishers of men. You will take the Gospel into all the world. You will baptize in the triune name. Many will believe. Many more will not. You will die because of it."** They did. Each and every original disciple, minus Judas and John, would be put to death for preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments. Fishing, in the Christian church, means witnessing, that is sharing the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, with the world. That is why in our sermon text the fishermen are us, the net is the Gospel, the boat is the church, and the fish are the people. And that brings us back to the three promises.

1: The first truth is that the Gospel is for all people. Perhaps you remember the Old Testament story of the tower of Babel from Genesis 11. In the text, Moses tells us that, **"Now the whole earth had one language and the same words."** Some of these people, who had one language, migrated from the east and found a new land, a place called Shinar, and settled there. But settling there wasn't enough. No, they wanted more and in their desire to have more, they became foolish. So foolish in fact that they built a city with a tower that reached into the heavens, so as to make a name for themselves, **"lest we be dispersed over the entire face of the whole earth."** And you know the rest of the story. God came down, saw that they were trying to get to heaven by building a tower and so He dispersed them, each with their own language, separating them from being able to hear the Gospel for some time.

But then the Day of Pentecost happened. On that day, the Holy Spirit descended onto the disciples and at that moment, people who were no longer of one language, who were no more a one-people-nation, heard the Gospel in their own tongue. What a wonderful moment! Finally, people were able to hear of Jesus' love and death for them. And even more moving, is how Pentecost undid Babel. At Babel, the sin of pride and greed caused the people to be separated from God's promises. And in the upper room at Pentecost, the devil's work to keep God's people from the message of the Gospel was ruined with the sweet words of the Gospel, in the vernacular of the people.

It is true today as well. Luther translated the Bible in the language of the German people, giving them the ability to read and hear for themselves, the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. Today, the Bible is printed in more languages than any other book and the message of the Gospel reaches more people than ever before, truly it is for all people.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the Gospel is for you too. When you are at the end of your rope, the Gospel is for you. When all seems hopeless and lost, the Gospel is for you. When your dreams seem to float away, the Gospel is for you. When you have little faith, the Gospel is for you. And when you sin, the Gospel is especially for you.

2: The second truth is that the church is called to be fishers of men too. God called disciples to be fishers of men because they were to take the Gospel to the churches they were to pastor and to the world in which they lived. Can you imagine the conversation they must have had with themselves, "How will I ever fish for people? How will I share the Gospel with them? I'm an introvert, I don't like people really, and what if I mess it up and say or do something wrong?" Such an amazing weight to carry, and a great responsibility to share the Gospel. Yet Jesus promises that when we are fishing for people, when we are sharing the Gospel with others, that He doesn't leave us to our own devices. No, rather He equips us to go into all the world and to tell others about Jesus.

The Southeastern District and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod both have evangelism tools that we can use to share the Gospel with those around us. In the coming months, we will look at both of those tools. As wonderful as these tools are, we as Lutherans have something even better that is given by our Lord and Savior to help us catch more fish and that is His Word and the Catechism. Knowing God's Word, for you, is so important. It gives us not only God's promise of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, but it also helps us to defend our faith, to answer those "hard questions" from our children, and to find comfort, hope, and peace from the womb to the tomb. Confirmation takes what Scripture says and expounds upon it. It puts it in ways that we understand what we believe and why. It strengthens our faith daily. And what we learn in Confirmation stays with us for a lifetime. We hold on to it when we are sick, broken, and dying. It's just one more way that God keeps His promise to us that He will never leave nor forsake us. How beautiful it is to know that what you learn in scripture, in church, in confirmation preserves and keeps you and gives you the tools to fish, to tell others about Jesus' saving grace for them.

3: Finally, the third truth is that fishing begins with faith. Sometimes our faith is small. It was with the disciples. Peter and Thomas are just two examples of people of God having small faith. Yet even with their moments of small faith, God's Word and promise endured, for them and for all people. But how did the disciples come to strengthen their small faith in big moments? The answer is simple: Jesus, Jesus, only Jesus. Faith is never about us; about what we do to save ourselves. No, faith is about God's work. He is the one that does it all. Our small faith, our fishing moments, begin and end with the Savior who came to die on the cross for our sins and the sins of the whole world. To share our faith with someone, anyone, to "go fishing", we must begin with Jesus and Him crucified. Here, in God's house, is where you'll strengthen your faith. Have you ever listened to the words of the benediction, "**The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with His favor, and give you peace.**" That blessing you receive that keeps you, His face shining upon you and being gracious to you, His looking upon you

with His favor and giving you His peace, is here, for you; in the waters of Holy Baptism, in the preaching and teaching of His Word, and in His Holy Supper. Here is God, the Comforter, the promised Paraklete, keeping you and sustaining you in your baptismal grace and into life everlasting.

Brothers and sisters in Christ. Let's go fishing. Let's go and tell others with both our words and our actions what our Savior has done for us and what He does for them too. God is with us. Here. Now. And we are ready. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.