### “Jump in the Lake” Steve Finlan for The First Church, May 1, 2022

**John 21:1–17**

1After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. 2Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. 3Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will go with you.” They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

4 Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5Jesus said to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” They answered him, “No.” 6He said to them, “Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. 7That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the lake. 8But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

9 When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. 10Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” 11So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. 12Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, “Who are you?” because they knew it was the Lord. 13Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. 14This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” 16A second time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” 17He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt . . . and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

Welcome, Easter people! Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Previously we have heard of the encounters of the disciples with the risen Savior in somewhat formal, indoor settings. Today’s Scripture tells of the apostles meeting Jesus outdoors while they are going about their daily work.

The disciples are fishing, but not catching anything, and a guy on the seashore tells them to throw the net in on the other side. They do not recognize him at first. The guy is right; there is a plethora of fish there. Then, Peter gets excited when John tells him that the guy who knows where the fish are, is Jesus. Peter throws on some clothes and jumps in the water, to swim to shore and maybe get there before the boat does. You’ve got to give Peter credit for being enthusiastic.

And yet, this is also the occasion where Jesus ends up hurting Peter’s feelings a little. I’ll get to that later. Let’s look at what happens after they pull the boat ashore. Jesus has a charcoal fire already going, and tells them to throw some of their fish on it. He cooks them breakfast, handing out bread and fish. They realize it is Jesus, but they are a bit afraid to speak to him.

Jesus then takes Peter aside and asks him “do you love me more than these?” Peter says of course, you know I love you. Jesus says “Feed my lambs” (22:15). Jesus asks again “do you love me?” Peter responds the same way, and Jesus says “Tend my sheep” (21:16). A third time Jesus asks if he loves him. This is when Peter feels hurt, and says “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus says to him, “Feed my sheep” (21:17). This is a way of emphasizing his point and making it memorable. Jesus wants to make loving and serving others the foundation of our interactions. To “feed” the sheep and tend to lambs is to love them and feed them spiritually. It is to love others as the Father loves us.

Ministry is fundamentally a job of spiritually feeding the sheep, and Jesus teaches this in a way that will not be forgotten. Maybe Peter feels a sense of shame or hurt whenever he recalls it, but I don’t think the pain was the point, rather the vividness and memorability. Peter’s service after this will always grow out of his love. It is because he loves Jesus and shows that love to others that he will feed the sheep.

Our service should also grow out of our love. If service is not loving, then it is just moralistic or mechanical. If we remember the love that has been shown to us, then we can love people whom we are just meeting for the first time. Love creates a slow burn within, which yearns to find an outlet. Peter was sincere, and he had love within him. Honest sincerity certifies our actions. Loving kindness is memorable, for it enriches the lives of others.

In the spiritual realm, sincerity goes a long way. It is noticeable to others, and tends to convince them of the validity of one’s cause. It is brimful with hope and vision. And we are advised, in Proverbs, “Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint” (29:18 ASV). Sincerity and vision are drivers of the spiritual life. Peter was driven by this sincerity. This is part of what made him a convincing preacher. People hungered for truth, sincerely expressed and based on love. Their encounters with Peter were memorable, sparking a spiritual flame which spread to others.

Sincerity makes for genuineness and surety. There was a teacher who had two theology students, one of them sincere but sometimes a bit fearful, the other one quiet brazen and brave but sneaky and insincere. The teacher taught them both the same lessons, and the students tried to internalize the message and speak it forth in their sermons. The sincere student gave his sermons, but sometimes had some self-doubt, and it sometimes weakened his presentation. The insincere student learned how to be bold and energetic, and people didn’t perceive his insincerity at first. They thought he was a powerful speaker and a natural leader.

Both became pastors of churches. The bold student generated a larger congregation, but he began to generate some resentment among church leaders by the way he bullied them behind the scenes. Eventually some of the lay leaders confronted him about this behavior. He threw a tantrum and resigned from the church, saying he would leave and start a new church. Some of his devoted followers went with him, but the church that was left behind went through a difficult and confusing time, not knowing how to process the experience.

Some people lost their faith, many drifted away from the church, and the next pastor had a dwindled flock, and a somewhat unsteady and insecure congregation. Meanwhile, the sincere student’s church underwent a very slow, but very steady growth of membership, and a step-by-step development of a strong sense of solidarity and faith. Most of us would prefer the outcome of the slow-growing church under sincere leadership.

I mentioned fear and self-doubt because they are common human problems, but ones that can be overcome. Fear of self-exposure and self-doubt can get in the way and diminish our effect, but these are not spiritually fatal as insincerity is. Peter showed fear on at least two occasions, once when he denied that he knew Jesus while outside during the Sanhedrin’s rigged trial, and once when he gave in to some Judaizers and refused to eat with Gentile Christians (Gal 2:12). But he was fundamentally sincere, and he outgrew these misbehaviors, gained confidence, learned integrity through experience, and became the unofficial leader of the Jesus movement. And finally when agents of the empire came to arrest him for preaching in Jesus’ name, he courageously gave up his life for the Savior whom he loved.

We know from his epistle, his letter, that Peter preached about the love and non-retaliation that Jesus showed when *he* was mistreated by *his* enemies (1 Pet 2:23). He lauded the faith and love of those who love Jesus, who believe in Jesus “although you have not seen him” (1 Pet 1:8). In his epistle, Peter wrote “Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart” (1:22). He encouraged believers, saying “You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God. . . All flesh is grass . . . but the word of the Lord endures for ever” (1:23–25). With such words of comfort, he fed the sheep, as Jesus told him to do.

Peter showed his sincerity and love—and no fear—when he jumped in the lake out of excitement and anticipation of meeting up with the risen Lord. May we have the same sincerity and enthusiasm. Show your love; jump in the lake of Life! May all your service be motivated by love, both by the love you have received from Jesus and by the love you feel toward others. Abide in God’s love. Let loving-kindness in your service adventures bring you joy. Take comfort that his peace is with you, now and always.