

Dave Bena

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Preacher: Bishop Dave Bena

[0:00] Amen. Blessed Lord, we love you. Please speak to us words of love in your word.

! It is always a joy and a privilege to look out in this congregation and see brothers and sisters in Christ.

Thank you for this opportunity. Alright, I'm going to ask some questions. Hand up if you've ever gone fishing.

A lot of you have gone fishing, okay? Put your hands down. Hand up if you've ever gone fishing at night. Not as many. Hand up if you've ever gone fishing all night and not caught a blooming fish. I thought I'd be the only one, okay. When I was a little kid, we had a river right down the road from our house called Fish Creek.

[1:23] And Fish Creek had fish. My father and my brothers, my brothers were older than me, liked to go at night fishing because fish are feeding as it gets dark.

And I wanted to go, I wanted to go, I wanted to go. I was about five. Are there any five-year-olds in the crowd today? Yeah. So I was about that size.

And I whined and whined and finally my mother convinced my father, take David with you. And so there we were.

It was night and we were fishing. My brothers were like age 9, 15, and 17. And there I was. Well, it seemed to me like we fished all night. We probably fished till about 8 p.m. And we caught zero fish.

[2:25] I thought this is the dumbest. Why did I want to come to this? Well, so heading home, frustrated, angry, and tired.

I look at that today and I realize this is what the apostles were feeling that night. Today's gospel from John 21 is a heap big fishing story.

And guess what? It was not just meant to fill in pages. It was meant to teach us something. To love us into following God.

So with this John 21 passage, we're going to first look at the context. Then we'll look at the content. And then we'll look at the commitment. So first, the context.

This is, in case you haven't noticed, Easter season. And in our faith group, Easter goes on for like 50 days. And each Sunday, the gospels highlight a resurrection appearance of Jesus.

[3:37] Today, we are in the last chapter of the gospel of John. The apostle John is believed to be the writer of this gospel.

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he put together a life of Jesus. And he ended, in true writer fashion, the gospel with a bang.

A fishing story. A fishing story in a miraculous way. So that's the context. And now we look at the content to glean what God might have for us through the apostle John.

So we look at the first verse. It says, After this, Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias.

And he revealed himself in this way. So after this. What does that mean? After what? Well, we have to remember that last week, the gospels spoke about Jesus appearing to the apostles at night.

[4:56] Where they were afraid. They were locked in. They were afraid they were going to be crucified as well. And Jesus appeared to them. The next week, you'll recall, Thomas was now there.

And Jesus said, Look at my hands. Put your hand in my side. See, it's really me. And I'm alive. This is now after those things.

The scene changes from Jerusalem back up to Galilee. That's the first thing. That's after those things. The second important part about this verse is he uses a term.

John uses a term. Jesus revealed himself. Do you know what that word is in Greek? Epiphany. Jesus was an epiphany for these apostles on this occasion.

A manifestation. A showing of God. So, Jesus wasn't just hanging around to get some fish. He was the presence of God in this situation.

[6:10] He was there. That's verse 1. Now, verse 2. Simon Peter, Thomas called the twin, Nathaniel of Cana and Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of the disciples were together.

Why were there not 11? What did those seven have in common? They were fishermen. Thank you. They were fishermen. And so, the four that weren't there, what did they miss?

They missed the miracle. We don't know where they were. They may have been tending to family business. They may get seasick.

They weren't going out in a boat. We don't know where they were, but they missed the miracle.

Well, for us, are we always present at worship?

[7:07] I'm not even talking about physically present. I'm talking about emotionally and mentally present. I have found that sometimes I drift. I may be the only person.

I kind of drift away, and on Tuesday, I'm going to get the car washed. I miss the presence of Christ. I miss the miracle. God wants me to be all in. In the boat, loving Him, fishing. That's what I'm called to do.

But talking about this fishing thing, verse 3, Simon Peter said to them, I'm going fishing. They said to him, we'll go with you.

They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Question. Why'd they go fishing? What was Peter thinking?

[8:09] Why did John, who was there, one of the sons of Zebedee, why did he put this in here? Could it be that Peter was going back to his old way of life?

I mean, he hadn't seen Jesus for a while, and he was uncertain about the mission, but he knew about fishing. It could have been, this was his way of maybe melding back into the population, carrying back into the family business.

Sometimes we all get caught up into that. You know, I left the Marine Corps and went into seminary. And I went into seminary when anti-Vietnam was big.

And some of my seminary classmates were at the protestations in Washington, D.C. because our seminary was right across the river from Washington.

And on certain weekends, when I was doing my Marine Reserve duty, I would dress in my uniform, and classmates would dress in their black leather jackets, and we'd go for two very different missions on that weekend.

[9:36] And frankly, I was fed up. I was fed up with the whole anti-war thing. But I struggled along in seminary, and in December, we went down to Florida for a vacation.

And I was deeply troubled. I have made a big mistake. I've moved my family from a secure way of life into this wacky ministry thing.

Why did I leave the Marine Corps? And one day I was lying on the beach, and what should come across in front of me? An A6 intruder.

I said, it's a sign. It's a sign. God wants me to go back to A6 intruders. And so I was happy.

I made my decision going to go back up to Virginia, resign, go back in the Marine Corps. And thankfully, God placed a wonderful professor in my life.

[10:47] So I went to John Rogers' house, and I said, this was a mistake. I'm going back, because I can minister as a layperson just as well as I can as an ordained person, which was true.

John Rogers said, you know what? You sound like Peter wanting to go fishing to me. And then he told me his story.

He had been a Marine officer. I mean, talk about godly timing. I went back to ordained ministry with gusto once I'd gone through the crisis.

That's what happened to Peter. God arranged the meeting. He arranges meetings for us when we're moving forward and then suddenly think we need to go back.

All of us have a temptation to go back. We understood what was back there. We don't know what's up ahead of us. What would have happened if Peter had just gone back to fishing?

[11:57] Faith would look a lot different today. God had a way of touching his life. He's got a way of touching our lives.

But anyway, they're back out on the water, aren't they? They're fishing all night and they catch no fish. The spiritual interpretation, they had moved away from God, they were on their own and they got zero fruit out of it.

Just as the day was breaking, it says on verse 4, Jesus stood on the shore, yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, children, do you have any fish?

They answered him, no. Simple dialogue. They didn't recognize Jesus on the shore. Partly, it was kind of dark.

It hadn't gotten fully light yet. But they didn't recognize him. They were so tired, frustrated, and angry, they didn't have the eyes to see Jesus.

[13:08] Do you get it? That is so us. Jesus had to make the initial encounter happen in simple terms.

How many times have you said this to people fishing? Getting any bites? I said that just a week or two ago when I was jogging. I said, are you getting any bites?

And he said, mosquito. Talking. Talking. Jesus gets our attention. How does Jesus get your attention?

Could it be in a sermon? Could it be the words of a friend or someone we know? Could it be a radio program? Listen and watch. Have eyes to see Jesus.

Jesus. So finally, he said to them, after they said, nope, no fish tonight, he said to them, cast the net on the right side of the boat and you'll find some.

[14:11] So they cast it. And now they were not able to haul it in because of the quantity of the fish. Obviously, they had to follow his advice.

What if they had said, we don't know who you are, but you're not in this boat and we're going to fish the way we fish? Well, that would be a typical reaction, wouldn't it be?

I remember my older brother giving me advice on how to play football. And I knew that he had never played football. And so I kind of told him what he could do with his advice.

But then I thought about it. You know, he said, when you run through the line, now you've got your head down, you can't see. When you get through that line, lift up your head and go to the outside.

And I thought about that. You know, that makes a lot of sense. He may not know anything about football, but he knows something about carrying a football.

[15:18] Sometimes we need to hear that advice of brothers and sisters. Jesus sometimes speaks to us through the brothers and sisters of our congregation. So he gave big advice and they had a big catch.

And here's where it gets interesting. Verse 7. Interesting comment from John on this.

He's talking about personalities and how God melds us together with different personalities. John, being more introspective, says to Peter, that's the Lord.

What does Peter do? Peter jumps in the water and swims like crazy toward Jesus. Do you remember that movie, Forrest Gump, where Forrest is driving his boat toward the shore and he looks up and who does he see up there?

Lieutenant Dan. He jumps in the water, swims as only Forrest Gump could to the water, forgetting all about his boat. Right? And the boat turns into the dock.

[16:48] And what is his famous statement? That's my boat. Peter didn't worry about his boat. He just used his personality, crashed through.

It's interesting that God takes all of us with different personalities and melds us together. Some of us are more introspective. Some of us are more, how did I get here?

Some of us know where we're going and nobody's going to stop us. And somehow, God crafts a congregation together to proclaim the gospel through different personalities.

So that was the big swim and the big haul. So who had to carry the fish in? The rest of the apostles, not Peter.

Because Peter was doing his thing. Sometimes we have to pick up for someone who may set the tone. And we're called to do the work.

[17:52] And so we're getting close to the end here. The other, verse 9, when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire in place with fish laid out on it and bread.

Jesus said to them, bring some of the fish that you've just caught. So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore full of large fish, 153 of them.

And although there were so many, the net was not torn. 153. What? How did they count?

Why would they count the fish to come out to 153? Does that make sense? Well, it does if you're fishermen. If there are seven of you in the boat, how do you divide those fish?

You've got to count them. 153 big fish. Even though they were big fish, they all fit in the net.

[18:56] We're getting spiritual here. How many people are here in church today, Jim? See that?

We did not rehearse that. Church leaders count fish. Oh, there's 42.

No, you already counted him. We not only count fish, but we record fish. Just like they did with the real fish. And you and I are the fish.

We count fish. Each parish counts fish. And we send the report of all these fish up to some headquarters where it gets lost in a big black hole.

No, that's not true. We use that as kind of a gauge. How are we doing? It's really important to do that. The fishermen needed to know how many fish there were.

[20:02] And in quick order, he counted 150, 151, 152. That one jumped back out. 151. He got to 153 fish. And those fish are you and me.

It's been said that there were 153 species of fish. That was what was believed then. There were 153 species of fish.

The spiritual content is there's room for all of us in the net. That's a great thing.

You're not excluded in God's kingdom. You're part of his kingdom. And at one point, we all come to a realization that we're part of those 153.

For me, although I was raised in the net with all the other fish, I didn't realize I was a fish. It was not until I was 24 that I realized I'm a fish.

[21:15] And I belong to Jesus. And he's caught me with his love. And I knelt down and repented and turned my life to Christ.

I was in the net. You're called to be in the net. And so we come to the end. This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

You see, the summary of this sermon is that the resurrected Jesus feeds us miraculously as he did that morning with the fish for the apostles.

In the midst of our frustrations, exhaustion, anger, and uncertainty, he stands and guides us to the big catch.

You see, we once were lost, but now we're found. We were blind, but now we see. Today, when we continue our liturgy, at the confession, let's pour out our hearts asking forgiveness.

[22:27] Let's recommit our lives to Christ and let's allow him to feed us a spiritual breakfast. Happy fishing.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Thank you.