

Gone Fishing

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[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 7th of May 2000. The preacher is Phil Muleman.

His sermon is entitled Gone Fishing and is from John chapter 21 verses 1 to 14. Let's pray. Our Father we do thank you for your word. And Lord we pray that as we read it, as we understand it, that we would indeed give you great praise. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

You may like to open to John chapter 21 on page 883 as we look at verses 1 to 14. When you've been through a stressful time, there is nothing better to help you psychologically than a bit of time out, is there?

You need time to regroup, time to refresh, time to take stock and prepare yourself for the next encounter that life dishes up for you.

[1 : 05] One thing that a lot of people like to do when they take some time out is go fishing. Either off the beach or on a boat, out on the bay, up the river.

Somewhere quiet and away from the hustle and bustle of life. And while you're waiting for the fish to bite, and if you're like me, you wait a very long time, there's a lot of time to think about the past events.

The things that have gone on in the past. And also time to think about and contemplate the future. Well, the disciples of Jesus have had a turbulent time over the past few weeks, haven't they?

Their life has been one huge emotional rollercoaster. They have gone from the euphoria of Palm Sunday, with the crowd shouting out, Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed be the one who comes in the name of the Lord! As Jesus comes into Jerusalem, they've gone from that euphoria on the Palm Sunday, down to the utter depths of despair, on that first Good Friday, when their leader was sadly executed on the cross.

[2 : 23] And then three days later, they were swept up again to the heavens, by the glory of Jesus' resurrection. It has been one big emotional rollercoaster.

And a good night's fishing was probably just what the doctor would have ordered. And I think they probably would have welcomed the opportunity to regroup, and to return to an environment of familiarity.

So we read here in verse 2, that seven of the disciples have left the city walls of Jerusalem, and returned to the Sea of Tiberias. Which is better known to us as the Sea of Galilee.

And they've gone there, perhaps, to take up their old job of fishing. After all, they still have to earn a living. They still have to put bread and butter on the plate, so to speak.

But the reason they have gone, is because Jesus has told them to. When Jesus appeared to the disciples, after his resurrection, he says to them, and to other eyewitnesses on at least two occasions, do not be afraid.

[3 : 33] Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee. There they will see me. Now those words, or words to that effect, are seen in Mark's Gospel, and in Luke's, Matthew's Gospel.

So, sure, they've gone, and they've gone there for their emotional well-being. But more importantly, they have gone there, because the risen Jesus has told them to go.

And it's important that we, too, look after our emotional well-being. But it's more important that as Christians, we seek to make God the number one priority in our lives.

And that means being obedient to his word, listening to what his word says, regularly reading it and inwardly digesting it and outwardly expressing it, praying on God's word, praying through the scriptures, praying about things that go on in our lives, and acting upon things.

And as we do that, as we take scripture seriously, take our Christian lives and our Christian walks seriously, it also helps to keep our emotional well-being in check as well.

[4 : 49] Well, the disciples have gone to the Sea of Tiberias, and there's a map here which sort of makes sense. They've gone from Jerusalem, which, if you put the pen on there, they've gone from there and they've gone up, sort of north, to the Sea of Galilee.

And I think it's around about 60 miles. I'm not really sure of the distance. I tried to work that out. And they're probably, thanks, they're probably waiting for Jesus to appear.

They're waiting there. And while waiting, it's a good opportunity to do a spot of fishing. Well, there you go.

Peter, forever the initiator among the disciples, says, I'm going fishing, to which they respond, we'll go with you. Now, these guys that, Peter, who's gone fishing, are professional fishermen.

But this is a picture of someone who we know well on the Sea of Galilee. And they're pathetic. It's not even an attempt at fishing.

[5 : 52] It's a hopeless case. Well, these, thanks, you can take that down, get rid of it. The disciples, Peter says, I'm going to go fishing.

And they say, we'll go with you. And they go. And these guys are professional fishermen. Their livelihood came from it before they went with Jesus to learn how to be fishers of men.

And they know where the best places to fish are and when the right time to fish is. And night time is a favourite time, apparently, for fishing the Sea of Galilee.

These guys, they're professionals. They don't have a piece of fishing line and a bit of bait. They have nets as well as a boat. to haul their catch in. And these guys are professionals.

What do they do? They go fishing. And they don't catch anything. They don't catch a brass razoo.

This all-night fishing vigil has proved fruitless.

[6 : 57] What a disappointment it must have been for them. And if you were to be walking along and you ask them, how's business? Their response would have been terrible. Haven't got a thing.

They wouldn't have been happy about that at all. Well, as they return to shore from this fruitless night's expedition of fishing, in the dim early morning light, turn that on again, we have a photo here of the shores of Galilee.

You might want to move it down a little bit. I'm not sure if that's sunrise or sunset. What is it? It must be sunset. I think it's sunset. But anyway, this is Lake Galilee. We conspired during the week for all these sorts of things.

There's the shores of Galilee. They're coming back into shore and in the dim morning light, a stranger hails them from the shore. And in verse 4, we're told that it is Jesus, but the disciples don't recognise him.

Probably because of the distance that Jesus is away. Verse 8 tells us that he's about 100 yards away and there's the dimness of the morning light.

[8 : 06] It's very hard and hazy to pick out the people from those sorts of distances. But it's also worth noting that Jesus is not recognised after each post-resurrection appearance, no matter how close he is to them.

Think back onto those occasions as well. Well, Jesus dares to ask the question that we all like to ask when we see a fisherman standing on the beach with his fishing rod and his bucket and his basket.

He dares to ask that question. But his question has a bit more implied knowledge in it. He says, children, you have no fish, have you?

He knows that they have no fish. Children, you have no fish, have you? And he goes on, cast your net on the right side and you will find some. professional fishermen aren't noted for taking advice, are they?

Especially taking advice from strangers who are still on land. But there's something in Jesus' voice, something in his voice which gives them confidence.

[9 : 16] They take his advice and they cast their net on the other side of the boat and to their amazement, they catch an astonishing amount of fish. So big a haul that they cannot haul the net in.

It's much like in a sense if you go fishing for a weekend up the Yarra River to go and catch a few trout. And you've been casting, you rod for hours and you don't catch a thing and you're really lousy.

Driving home, you're stopping at Buxton at the trout firm and you catch dinner for two weeks in ten minutes. You think, why bother going trout?

Why bother going trout fishing or fishing out on the ocean when you spend all your time catching nothing? You can just go to Buxton and catch ten fish in ten minutes and I think it's great. This amazing haul of fish that they bring in leads to recognition. It leads to the recognition of Jesus. And we see here the reaction of Peter and John, the disciple whom Jesus loved.

[10:24] Peter and John's reaction as well is in line with their reaction to the empty tomb back in chapter 20. For John, there is the moment of revelation. In verse 7 here he says, it is the Lord.

And if you look back to chapter 20 we read that when he went into the empty tomb after Jesus had risen, he saw and believed. The moment of revelation for John.

Peter and John's Peter, there is the summons to action. In verse 7 here, as soon as he heard it was the Lord, as soon as Peter heard it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea.

Stares into action. And back in chapter 20 when he arrived at the empty tomb, he went straight into the tomb and saw the linen wrappings and so on.

Stares into action. And on recognition of the Lord, on recognition of Jesus on the foreshore, Peter also suitably attires himself to meet his Lord and God.

[11:26] Peter is summonsed into action. The other disciples follow. They come to shore and they come in the boat bringing with them the haul of fish.

Now at the end of a hard day at the office or in the disciples' case a hard night's fishing, you're hungry, aren't you? And the last thing that you want to do when you get home from work is go and prepare a meal.

And so it is for these disciples. They don't want to go and prepare a meal. They haven't got any fish. Well they didn't before this time anyway. Anyway, they get ashore and to these disciples' amazement there is a charcoal fire lit and burning and on it are some fresh fish.

And some fresh bread. Sounds delicious, doesn't it? Jesus invites them to bring some of the fish that they have caught and place it on the fire as well.

And Peter helps, goes back in his inimitable style. He goes back and he hauls the unbroken net ashore and with such a large catch of fish, big ones at that, they can't help but count them.

[12:38] Any good fisherman wants to count their catch, don't they? Well, how many fish have they got? 153. 153 whoppers. What a story this is going to be to tell people.

Any good fisherman can't resist the temptation to count such an enormous catch. Well, Jesus invites them to come and eat breakfast. He dishes out the food and they no doubt eat a very satisfying meal, well content and so on.

153. But at no time do they ask who he is, for they know that he is the risen Lord and it is the risen Lord Jesus who is there in their presence.

And John tells us in verse 14 that this is the third appearance of Jesus to the disciples since he was raised from the dead. Now it is worth pointing out that before Jesus appeared on the shore of the sea of Galilee, the disciples had no fish in their nets, not a one.

Yet from Jesus' command to throw the net onto the right side of the boat, they bring in a monstrous catch. Jesus not only provides the whole of fish here, but when they get ashore, what has he done?

[13:57] He has provided for them the fish and bread freshly cooked on this charcoal fire. Where have these fish and where has this bread come from?

It doesn't exactly tell us in the passage, but it is implied that it comes from Jesus, doesn't it? Jesus has provided for them here. Now I want you to cast your minds back to the beginning of the Gospels of Mark and Luke.

In those two Gospels, Jesus declared fishing to be a basic symbol for his service. In Mark chapter 1, there is the story where Jesus is going out and gathering his disciples and he finds Peter and Andrew fishing by the Sea of Galilee or on the Sea of Galilee.

And when Jesus is walking along there, he calls out, follow me and I will make you fish as a people. In Luke chapter 5, he recounts, Luke recounts the story of the huge haul of fish that Peter and the other workers had caught when Jesus told them where to cast their nets.

Again, he told these people where to cast their nets. And on that occasion, as on this occasion, the haul was so great that the nets were beginning to break.

[15:12] And the boats where they were starting to load the fish into were starting to sink. That's a lot of fish. But Jesus declares to Peter and the others in that boat who were terrified of Jesus at his command when he says to put your net down there.

Peter is terrified and he says, stay away from me, I'm a sinner. Jesus says to Peter and the others there, do not be afraid. From now on, you will be catching people.

And what did they do? What did they do? They left everything and followed Jesus. So just as fishing was symbolic for the mission of the disciples at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, it is symbolic here at the end of Jesus' earthly mission.

While Jesus was alive, these disciples were taught to be fishers of people by none other than God's Son, Jesus. The Christ. The one chosen by God.

And these disciples were taught what their mission would be. And now that Jesus is risen from the dead and his ascension is impending, the hour of that mission is at hand.

[16 : 29] Now Jesus' hour came as he went to the cross and when he got to the cross, his hour came, didn't it? Where he took on the punishment for the sins of the people. There on the cross, Jesus laid down his life so that we may live and be children of God.

And the disciples' hour now is at hand for them where they will go and tell about the risen Jesus and about the fact that through Jesus forgiveness of sins are possible.

people. And that as a result of that eternal life is made possible for us as well. So as Jesus was sent into the world by God the Father to proclaim the good news, so now Jesus sends his disciples into the world to proclaim that same message.

And it's because God's peace has been made through Jesus' death and resurrection. And because of that, he is now able to send his disciples to proclaim this good news.

This encounter of Jesus and the disciples becomes a parable for the disciples' impending work. And it's also a parable for ours as well.

[17 : 48] You see, what Jesus does here is illustrate the secret of effective mission. There's a huge contrast here when the disciples went out on their own initiative to fish and when they fished at the direction of Jesus.

On their own, they caught nothing. On Jesus' direction, the boat was full of large fish. Back in chapter 15, Jesus says, Apart from me, you can do nothing.

This story speaks so clearly to us when we take note of the way in which we seek to proclaim the gospel message in all that we do. Because without Jesus involved in the proclamation of the gospel, of the good news of Jesus Christ, we can do nothing.

We need to listen to his word. We need to hear his voice and discern the Spirit's guidance in the message that we have to proclaim. Yet all too often, all too often, we tend to rely too much on the resources or latest methods of evangelism for gospel proclamation rather than seek and trust God in the process.

We rely on the tools, if you like, rather than the power of prayer. Now, it's fine to have all these tools. Don't get me wrong about that. It's fine to have the internet if you don't get that message which comes and says, I love you.

[19 : 19] It's fine to have a website. It's fine to run courses which proclaim the gospel, such as the Y course, the Christianity Explained, and the People of God.

It's fine to run courses on how to do evangelism, such as everyday evangelism. I'm not bucketing them that at all. We're fortunate to have all of those sorts of resources at our hands.

We have the know-how. We have the resources, just like the fishermen had the know-how and the resources for fishing. But all their know-how, no matter how vast it was, didn't bring them fish when they relied upon it.

We too cannot rely solely on our own know-how and the resources at our disposal, no matter how good they are. Because they're not what brings people into a relationship with the living God. Those tools can help. But we need to let God do the work. We need to let God be the one who is in charge. We need to be His willing servants in the big picture of gospel proclamation.

[20 : 30] I wonder if part of the problem in our Western world, in the church, I wonder if the Western church is in decline because it relies too much on its own know-how and resource rather than trusting in God.

In contrast to this, churches in the third world, in their poverty and weakness, have to rely on prayer for the power of God as well as the simple direct sharing of the gospel message.

Some areas throughout the third world regions have had massive growth in recent years. They've had willing people who've been obedient and served God in the process.

And I think that we have a lot to learn from our brothers and sisters in these parts of the world about how to proclaim the gospel. Now I know as I speak there are some big generalizations in what I'm saying.

There's certainly areas in the Western world where churches are growing and we're seeing good fruit. But my point is this. We need to be dependent upon the Lord when seeking to proclaim the gospel.

[21 : 45] And that comes only through prayer, through His word and through trust in Him alone. Don't throw out the tools in proclaiming the gospel.

Don't get rid of them. But rely on God and only on God to do the work, not on our own know-how. One writer says that what we can do without Jesus is not a little.

We can do nothing. It is by dying to reliance on ourselves and our abilities that we discovered resurrection life and the harvest of the kingdom.

So the secret of effective mission for the proclamation of the gospel is by total reliance upon God. And with this reliance on God, then the scope of our mission, or the gospel proclamation that is telling others that God has brought salvation to the world through Jesus Christ, the scope of our mission is limited only by our imagination.

The catch of fish the disciples haul in at Jesus' direction is large. It's 153 whoppers, according to the eyewitness account that we read here in John 21.

[23 : 05] Now as you reflect on the centuries gone by, the gospel has been proclaimed and many, many, many people have been brought into a saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

God has used many people in the process of turning sinful people back to him, back into a relationship with him. And that charge is no less a charge for us today.

We're still called as his people to proclaim the gospel. We are still called today to cast the net and to be fishers of people in Jesus' name.

And we should expect God to use us in the process just as he has done with others, countless other people throughout the ages. Because today, Jesus still continues on inviting those he came to save to come and dine with him.

Come and dine. The master calleth, come and dine. You may feast at Jesus' table all the time. He who fed the multitude, turned the water into wine, says to hungry, thirsting sinners, come and dine.

[24 : 26] Have we been doing our share? Have we been inviting and telling others about the feast that Jesus has prepared for those who trust him? Amen.