

“Waiting in Galilee”

by Pastor Steve Hammond on 5/10/2020
Text: John 21:1-14 at FBC of Newport, NH

//1 Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. [a] It happened this way: 2 Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus^[b]), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. 3 “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.//

—John 21:1-3 (NIV)

Going to Galilee was very important to Jesus. If you recall in Mark 16:7, it was a vital part of the angelic message to the disciples in connection to his resurrection. *“But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’”* This was planned by Jesus. His disciples no doubt didn’t understand it, but they had heard him speak of it, at least at the Last Supper. *“But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”* (Mark 14:28)

Of course it was important for Jesus to appear in Jerusalem, for that is where he was crucified and where those closest to him were huddled in confusion. And, Jerusalem is Jerusalem; “the city that kills the prophets.” Jesus *had* to appear there for sure. But Galilee was nevertheless important in Jesus’ plan for his resurrection appearances. No doubt it was important for that Great Commission meeting on the top of a prearranged mountain, which we’ll hear about next week. But they were about to find out that it was important to Jesus for a number of other reasons as well, starting with a surprise meeting on the sea of Galilee.

In obedience to Jesus’ instructions, the disciples left Jerusalem and went to Galilee. They knew they were to meet with him on a designated mountain, but they didn’t know what to do in the meantime. There was no commissioning to go preach the Gospel, nor had the Spirit come to equip them for it. So Peter, true to form, came up with his own idea. “I’m going fishing,” he said. And six others went with him. Some have speculated that they were being tempted to go back to their old ways, but I think that’s very unlikely. You can’t just dismiss the fact that they’d already met the resurrected Jesus now on multiple occasions. Even Thomas was on board with them now, in every sense of the word. And there’s nothing in the text to make you think they were backing away from their calling to follow Jesus. They simply didn’t know what to do.

It’s far more likely they just weren’t the kind of people to stand around and do nothing. That is, unless it was the Sabbath and commanded by God himself. No such command by Jesus said those guys couldn’t go fishing ever again. In fact, Jesus seems to have joined them with his blessing.

These guys are out all night trying to catch fish. And as any fisherman can

tell you, some times the fish just aren't cooperating. They caught nothing. In the morning, when they're on their way in, they see someone on the shore. He asks if they caught anything and they reply with a simple, "No." Instead of that being the end of the dialogue, this person tells them to cast their net on the right side of the the boat. Hmmm.

Surely this brought back some vivid memories to at least some of those on board. Peter, James and John for sure, as they had been together when Jesus did this for them the first time. (see: Luke 5 only) So they cast their net on the right side and they caught a huge amount of fish. The text says later they knew it was Jesus, but they didn't dare quiz him about it. But Peter wasn't about to be coy. After John declared, "It's the Lord!" Peter jumped into the water to swim the hundred yards to where Jesus was. The rest of the crew hauled in the fish and followed. And there they all had breakfast with Jesus.

John identifies this as Jesus' third appearance. As I explained last week he wasn't counting heads; he was counting days. And this was the third particular day when Jesus made appearances after his resurrection. The first two were in Jerusalem on the first two Sundays after Passover. And now this third day was upon them, which interestingly was probably not on a Sunday. I find it hard to picture the disciples observing the Sabbath by resting and then immediately going fishing on Sunday (the night would be the start of the day). Sunday is the first day of the week, and it was a work day, but it was now, for two weeks in a row, the day when Jesus had made all his appearances. Why would they go fishing then?

It makes more sense that they waited all day expecting Jesus to show up. And when he didn't, Peter decided to resume a regular work schedule and get fishing. He wasn't going to just wait around all week. That would make it Monday morning, or any of the following work days.

So, here's something to take with us from this passage. The disciples found themselves in a time when they weren't quite sure what to do with themselves. Their normal schedule of life was there, but *not* there. They knew there was more to come, much more. Jesus was doing something absolutely amazing. And they were a part of it. But they weren't yet sure what to do.

I hear a new phrase used all the time now. "Stay safe." It's replacing "Have a nice day." But neither should be the major occupation of our lives. Our lives should be about Jesus Christ, whether we're waiting or whether we're fishing; whether we're catching fish or catching nothing. We should at least be on the lookout for when and where *Jesus* will show up next in our midst. And he will. For Jesus doesn't kill time. He's never left wondering what to do next. We may be, but not him. He always has a purpose, even even in a cookout on the beach. So our lives as Christians should be about watching and waiting—for him.

Next time you hear that common call to, "Stay safe," or "Have a nice day," let it remind you to listen for more, much more: for the unique word of the risen Lord saying to you: "Throw that net on the other side of the boat this time."