

## **Risen Christ Interrupts Fishing Expedition**

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Focus scripture passage: John 21: 1-19

“Gone Fishing,”

That’s the sign you would have seen roughly staked in the ground on the shores of the Sea of Tiberias. In this story, the disciples have just returned to Galilee after the disturbing and confusing events of Jesus’ crucifixion.

What else was there to do really? Apparently Jesus had already appeared to a few of them – first to the grieving women at the tomb and then again to those filled with fear who huddled together in a locked room.

But now what? Return to the Galilee? Return to their former lives? Peter, not one to stand around normally, posts his sign “Gone fishing,” and several others join him – all night as a matter of fact and they catch nothing.

I love that phrase, “Gone Fishing.” It’s quite common in our culture. It means, I’m out for a while – taking a break – taking some time to think things over. For a few of us in our congregation, it might even actually mean – gone fishing. I don’t know how many of you are fishermen/women. Though I’m no expert, I understand fishing takes skill, knowledge, the right equipment and not a little patience. And if everything goes right, you might even end up with a good fish story, if not a delicious fish for the frying pan.

Those first disciples were fishermen, and so they probably had skill, knowledge, the right equipment and patience and on this night they still caught nothing.

At daybreak, everything changed. Someone standing on the shore tells them to cast their nets on the other side. When they do what this man tells them, they haul in 153 fish. And then they recognize him.

Ted Swartz who was here for our Peace, Pies, and Prophets fundraiser on Friday night has a great version of this moment of recognition...

Parental warning before we watch it, some of the video you are about to see might be funny.

### **roll video clip from 3:32**

That moment of recognition is pivotal.

We know the power of it when we see it in their faces. Their recognition of Jesus changes things.

Breakfast on the beach follows with fish and bread – provided by none other than a resurrected Jesus. The connections aren't lost on the disciples this time – Jesus had already shown them that he could feed multitudes with a few fish and bread. Apparently the resurrected Jesus can do the same. He spoke to them and gave them directions; he provided breakfast for them and multiplied their efforts beyond their imagination.

If we were reporting this story, a good headline might be: *Risen Christ interrupts fishing expedition by making possible abundant catch and then provides breakfast.*

My question this morning – how does this resurrection appearance move from a good fish story (and it is a great story) to a life changing invitation to deeper faith? The gospel of John tells us straight up that these things were written after all so that you might come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.” Putting my question another way, Why does this story and the other resurrection stories matter? *The simple answer, is because they are true and no you don’t have to check your intelligence at the door to “believe” what I am saying. On the contrary bring all levels of your intelligence to bear on what you hear me say this morning.”*

When I told the children the story of Mary “seeing and recognizing” Jesus on Easter Sunday, I wondered with them, what it must be like to see Jesus and prayed with them that they too might one day see Jesus.

That’s my prayer for all of us, because seeing and recognizing Jesus, a living Jesus changes things. Again stated another way and more accurately, I think, finding out that a living Jesus has found a way to appear to you changes things.

First, I know the story that we have looked at today was not written as history in the way that a modern scientific worldview understands history. It was written in its own specific genre – known as a gospel – a Good news story with a particular purpose – conveying the good news and truth about Jesus. We also know that these stories were first committed to written form at the end of the first century, possibly a full generation after Jesus’ death and that they had a very particular meaning for their first hearers. For example The Johannine community as another preaching team member reminded me recently was a minority of Jesus-following Jews and Gentiles who had been kicked out of the Synagogue probably in Ephesus struggling to articulate and form a new identity after their harsh treatment at the hands of Jewish leaders. Afraid and persecuted, they might have feared for their lives. In this context it would not be hard to imagine that some grieved the lost members of their community just like Mary at the tomb. Some may have huddled in fear behind closed doors like the first disciples, and some tried to go about their work – maybe even went fishing. And the stories of Jesus’ appearance to others like themselves would have been deeply comforting.

But it is important to note that the fact that these stories were written down long after they or something like them happened and that they had particular meaning for those hearers does not limit their truth. It only deepens it. And the truth of these stories has continued to speak deeply to Christians ever since.

Let's consider truth for a moment. This word truth got particularly complicated when we started to equate historical factual truth (if that can ever be fully known) with Truth – capital T Truth.

This Truth with a capital T is different and requires that we bring every aspect of our intelligence to bear on it. Teachers are particularly aware of all the different kinds of intelligences that there are because they try to teach in such a way as to tap in to these various intelligences. As we've studied the brain we've discovered that there are ways to know things at many different levels, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musically, naturalistically, existentially etc. Most of us have some or all of those ways of knowing in various strengths and we can bring all of them to bear on the Truth or truths about Jesus and who he was and is.

Let me show you one part of the video again and show you a place that I see a moment of Truth – capital T Truth.

**roll video at moment 1:59 to 1:40.**

“Give me one good reason why we should do what he says,”  
Pause, I'll tell you why, because he's not going to shut up until we do.”

Note the quiet laughter in that moment. Note the pause. Note the look where the Truth of this emanates from the actor, Ted Swartz or the

character Peter or all of the above. In this moment – when Truth is being expressed – it doesn't matter who is who any more.

Unless, they do what Jesus says then Ted and Jason (the actors in this film) or Peter and Andrew (the characters that they represent) or those of us watching and resonating with this moment – the living Jesus, this Resurrected Christ is not about to leave them or us alone.

And the other moment of Truth of course ---

***Role video at 46 seconds to the end.***

And the other moment of truth is when they recognize him. “Do you think there'll be enough?” Again – you can see it in every fibre of their being – in the kinesthetic, existential, emotional and even logical intelligence as they put the pieces together. – fish, bread – Do you think there'll be enough!?!

Now – you could dismiss this truth – by saying they're just good actors, but while Ted was here this past week, I had an opportunity to hear from both him and Jason Hildebrand. They talked about their art with a small group of us and particularly about these moments – when the Truth is known and experienced and expressed in every fibre of their beings – for them those moments are more than acting. For them those moments are opportunities to express the Truth that they know.

Jesus, a living Jesus has ways of making himself and the truth about himself known.

And it's not that these characters had to go and find a living Jesus. They weren't actually looking. They did not expect to see him in some living form. The truth of recognition takes them as much by surprise as it does those who are told about it in story form later.

Jesus is the one who makes himself known. One could almost say he tracks them down and makes sure he comes to them in a way that they can recognize him. He comes to them in a way that their particular intelligence can recognize.

Remember again Mary in the garden,  
those huddled in fear in a locked room,  
those who had returned to the work they knew, and even those who had posted "Gone Fishing," signs. Jesus came to all of them. Why wouldn't a living Jesus also keep coming to us? Or keep speaking to us until we do what he says? The mystics through the centuries have been hearing him speak and that voice isn't a relic of the past.

Even an article in the April 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Mennonite (Volume 17, Number 7 April 1, 2013) tells this story about a voice and its transformative effect on Bogale Kebede, who became an important leader of the Meserete Kristos Church, an Anabaptist church in Ethiopia.

**Carl E. Hansen** in a Special to Canadian Mennonite writes:

As the notorious persecutor Saul of Tarsus was transformed by God's grace and is now remembered as the "apostle to the gentiles," so Bogale Kebede, charged and imprisoned for murder, was transformed

by God's grace to become Christ's apostle to the Kaffa" in Ethiopia. While in prison during a prayer of repentance, Kebede heard what he thought was the voice of the man praying for him. He heard the voice say, "You must ask for your case to be reviewed." It turned out not to be the voice of the man praying for him. When he did as he was bidden by this voice, the case against him was overturned and he has spent the last 30 years living a remarkable life that can only be explained by the power of the Holy Spirit and a living experience of Christ. One could say that a living Jesus tracked him down. The Meserete Kristos church, an Anabaptist church – part of Mennonite World Conference - has over 200,000 baptized members – about double the size of MC USA and over 400,000 worshippers in almost 600 churches and over 800 church planting centres. There must have been more than enough fish and bread.

In the end, I take from these stories both ancient and contemporary this truth, whether like Kebede you've gone down or found yourself on some terribly dangerous or lonely road initially, whether you've "Gone Fishing," to think things over, whether you're weighed down by a particular grief, or something internally or externally has you locked up in fear, a living Jesus is tracking you down. And there's even more truth revealed in these resurrection stories. First, this living Jesus gives guidance through word and instruction. It's a good idea to cast your nets where he tells you.



Second, this Jesus provides. Remember that breakfast on the shore? In my own life this kind of provision has happened over and over again. And finally, this Jesus creates fruitfulness where none was imagined. Peter and Andrew hauled a lot of fish out of that water and all they did was show up with their net and boat. Jesus makes the rest happen. The truth is he's still somewhere close by cooking fish and bread. And I bet there's more than enough.