

4:30 A.M.. Wednesday early April 2019. 6 men carpool from The Villages, Florida to Cape Canaveral for a full day of deep sea fishing. The charter boat takes them out 30 miles into the Atlantic Ocean. Two years ago, I went with the men. We caught our limit that day of Amberjack. I still remember asking a man named Bill Gebhardt, if he knew how to swim. Bill was struggling in his attempt to pull in a 50 pound amberjack. Bill said, "No Pastor, I don't know how to swim." As a result, I put my arms around him, to make sure he was not pulled into the ocean. The sharks had been circling our boat. In fact, a couple of the fish we pulled in were only partial Amberjacks, since the sharks took their bite out of them as we pulled them in. This year the charter boats told our men they weren't going for Amberjack, since the sharks were a big problem. Well, the boys from Open Bible couldn't be stopped. They pulled in 20 fish a few weeks back. Spanish Mackerel, Mahi Mahi, and a couple of tuna. No Amberjack. Their freezers now are filled with fish.

Everyone likes a good fish story. In our lesson for today, it looked like the disciples of Jesus were going to tell a story of how they got skunked fishing. They had been fishing all night and no fish. But then they were contacted by the Real fish finder, Jesus Christ. As a result, they caught so many fish, that they had to beach the boat, and haul the net with fish in by hand. 153 Fish. But better than popping out their cameras and taking a picture of all these fish, they had an even better picture to see before their very eyes. It was the Lord, the Risen Lord Jesus Christ on that beach. Jesus made sure that they would "Stay Hooked To IXTHUS".

Doesn't that word mean Fish? Correct. The Greek word for fish is ixthus. You often see that word on the back of cars within the shape of a fish. If you've ever wondered what that is supposed to symbolize - it's not just for people who like fish. The five letters that spell fish - iota, chi, theta, upsilon, sigma - are also letters that describe our Savior. Iota is the first letter of ihsus - for Jesus. Chi is the first letter for xristos - Christ. Theta is the first letter of theos - for God. Upsilon is the first letter for uios - Son. And sigma is the first letter for swthr - Savior. Jesus Christ, God, Son, and Savior. So the fish is used as a symbol for Christ. I don't know who or why they chose the symbol - but it fits - at least when you look at today's text - for Jesus uses some fish to prove that He was Jesus Christ, God, Son, and Savior - risen from the dead.

The reading for today takes place after Jesus had appeared to the disciples and to Thomas - again proving that He had risen from the dead. Apparently in between these appearances Jesus would leave them for a time. When you try to take a child from the bottle, you do it in increments. You start giving him or her a sippy cup at lunch. Then gradually you start giving a sippy cup in the evening, and finally at night. It takes a little time - but after a few tears and temper tantrums you're home free. That seems to be what Jesus was doing with these appearances. For forty days He didn't constantly stay with them - but weaned them from His presence. You see Jesus was soon going to ascend into heaven, and they would have to realize, he wouldn't be there right with them visibly all the time. It doesn't say how long of a period it was between these appearances, but it appears the disciples got a little restless. So Peter, in keeping with his personality, decided that he had to do something. He said, "I'm going out to fish." Six other disciples decided to go along.

It might seem strange to us that the disciples would make this decision to go fishing. After all, they had already seen Jesus raised from the dead. You might expect them to be out telling people about Jesus. Yet they go fishing. It appears that at this point Jesus had not told them to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit - nor had He given them the Great Commission - to go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Maybe they thought Jesus would come walking out to them on the water - like He had previously. In all

honesty, I don't think they knew what else to do. They didn't have Jesus to follow around. Life without direction left them searching for something to do - anything. They didn't just want to sit around and wait, so they decided to temporarily go back to what they knew best - fishing.

The disciples of Jesus Christ were still a bit uncertain about Jesus. I mean they had seen him hanging from a cross, bleeding, dying. They had witnessed him saying, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." They had witnessed his body carried away and placed in a tomb. Jesus had really died. Now, twice before this morning, he had appeared to them for a short time. Yes, he had come through a wall to see them, but was this really Jesus. Or maybe just a spirit of some sort. Did Jesus really have the power to help them deal with problems of life, like he used to be able to do? Was He really one of them, with flesh and blood, and the ability to eat food and drink water? Was He really and truly alive? These disciples still needed some convincing. So Jesus helped them recall something from the past. You see a few years earlier when He first called them as his disciples, he had been out in a boat with them. He had just finished preaching from a boat to the people on the shore. Then he instructed them to go into deeper water. Peter objected at first because they hadn't caught anything all night long. But Jesus told them to go into deep water and let their nets down. And lo and behold, they caught so many fish that the nets were breaking, and another boat had to come and help them. De ja vu. As the apostle John heard the man on the beach tell them to throw their net on the other side of the boat, and then witnessed a huge number of fish caught, he said to Peter, "It is the Lord". Jesus is with us. It is really Jesus!

As Jesus stirs this event in our minds, He wants us to know in the year 2019 that He is alive and well. His concern is that we understand He is there for us and that He loves us. He may not talk with us face to face over a meal of fish as He did with the disciples in our text, but the Risen Christ continues to speak to us in His Word. And in the Word it is evident that His concern for us spills into every area of our lives.

For example, it concerns our Risen Lord when we worry, so He tells us to cast all our anxieties upon Him. It concerns Christ when we are troubled or disheartened or weary of life, so He invites us to come to Him for rest. It concerns Christ when we feel we have to shoulder heavy burdens by ourselves, so He tells us to come to Him in prayer and ask with the promise that it will be given to us, seek and we shall find, knock and the door will be opened to us, all in harmony with His good and gracious will for our lives. It concerns Christ when we feel insignificant or of little worth, so He reminds us that we, individually, are of such great worth to Him that He gave His life for each of us, and that He loves us with an everlasting love. It concerns Christ when we are weighed down by our sins, so He points us to the cross and says, "Yes, you are a sinner, but when I said 'It is finished' I meant it. You are forgiven. So now, go forward living for me in the present rather than dwelling on the past." It concerns Christ when we feel lonely, so He comes to us with the assurance that He is with us always, even to the end of the age, and that He will never leave us or forsake us. Jesus is right here with us as we face the challenges of everyday life. We have a Risen Lord Jesus Christ.

If Jesus is with us and the disciples, and they have a boatload of fish, why on earth does he cook the disciples fish for breakfast? The disciples should have cleaned a few fish from the 153 and prepared dinner for Jesus. Why does the Resurrected Lord Jesus Messiah build a fire, bake some bread, fillet some fish, and prepare *anything* for the disciples? "Come and have breakfast." What a strange thing this is! The Lord of the Universe, the First fruits of the Resurrection, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the World, the Alpha, the Omega, the Bread of Life, Living Water, the King of Israel—we have come so far in John's Gospel!—

making breakfast on the beach for these ordinary fishermen. We have strange ideas about God at times, but this one is the strangest of them all: God making breakfast. Why? I think it is rather simple and it goes back to the upper room. One of the last things the disciples *experienced* with Jesus was in the upper room when he washed their feet before his crucifixion. The Bible says, "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." Now here is Jesus *after* his crucifixion, *after* his resurrection, still doing the same thing; serving. So Jesus is still modeling for his disciples the sort of life attitude that should characterize us as well. So then Christians, let's not look after our own needs, let's look to serve one another out of love.

Another question. Why isn't the meal like eating at a cafeteria? Once prepared, everyone serves themselves. Isn't it somewhat ironic that it is Jesus who does all the work in this Resurrection story? Jesus catches the fish. Jesus bakes the fish and bread—and builds the fire. Jesus asks all the questions. Jesus invites them to breakfast. Jesus takes the bread and fish and gives it to the hungry disciples who, after a failed night of fishing, were bound to be quite hungry. Do you think this Resurrection story teaches us that Jesus will make sure all of our needs in this life will be met? I am reminded of the passage, "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."

The wonderful thing about our Lord is that He gives us failures and successes in our fishing expeditions - but they're all designed to hopefully draw us closer to Him. He doesn't let us just waste away night after night without any testimony. He uses the smelly scales, the empty nets, the calm winds, and the tempestuous sea to rock our boats and point us to the shores of His grace. He doesn't allow us just to aimlessly drift away to sea. He loves us too much. Like the disciples He calls out to us - calls us His FRIENDS - and bids us back to shore. If you've been drifting - Jesus is calling you today. He's saying, "come back, come back!"

I hope that you can see another sea today, a sea of people. People who are lonely & lost & hurting. People who will never know the joy that you & I know as Christians unless somebody takes the time to tell them, & show them. The crowds of Easter have gone back home, but there are still fish to be caught. So the Lord commissions us to go & fish some more, for men, for women, for young people, for hearts & lives who desperately need the Lord. That is our challenge, "Go out into the world & tell the world about the risen Christ so that they, too, will know." May they catch a glimpse of the Real Keeper, Jesus Christ, God's Son our Savior, IXTHUS. Amen.