

CASTING THE NETS

Text: John 21:1-14
LHUMC 4/14/13

I. Introduction

A. Call me sacrilegious, but you have to wonder about those disciples.

1. Last week we were with them behind that locked door, that door that calmed their fears and gave them a false sense of security, that door that the risen Christ broke through not once but again a week later a second time.
2. At the end of the video version of the story that we saw last week, there were great exclamations and excitement.
3. And today, probably just a few days later, are they out spreading the great good news of the one who has risen again, the one who has the power not just to break through a locked door, but to change the world?
4. Apparently not—I picture them right before the video, sitting on the beach, or maybe in the immortal words of Otis Redding—“Sitting on the Dock of the Bay...wasting time.”
5. And at the beginning of today’s video, they certainly didn’t seem very enthusiastic rowing out in that boat, did they?
6. There seems to be a general spirit of lethargy or even depression as today’s story begins.
7. You can picture Peter yawning, saying “I’m going fishing”, and the others saying, “Oh, all right, we’ll go with you...it’s not like we have anything better to do.”
8. And so we’re not too surprised when they don’t catch anything.

B. However you interpret the mood at the beginning of today’s story, it is safe to say that if nothing else, these fishermen had gone back to what they knew best—back to the routine, back to what they knew way back before Jesus had called them away from all that to join him on his fishing expedition for people. We talked a couple of weeks ago about how Jesus turns Easter into an action verb—you have to wonder if those disciples got the memo!

1. And so today, instead of fishing for people with the best bait ever, bait that they had just been given—their own eyewitness account that Jesus had risen from the dead, they have gone back to fishing for fish.
2. And so if nothing else, those of us who get a little queasy when Jesus talks about casting our nets and fishing for people, we might

take a little comfort from these disciples, who apparently weren't all that enthusiastic about it either.

- C. And then along comes Jesus, whom they first notice standing on the shore. They don't recognize him, and again, you have to wonder why not—because they had just seen him.
 - 1. And Jesus calls out to them a question he no doubt already knows the answer to, “Hey boys, have you caught anything?”
 - 2. And unlike some fishermen I have known, at least they tell the truth—“Nope!”
 - 3. And Jesus then gives them the famous instructions on how and where to cast their nets if they really want to catch something.
- II. And so in the midst of those instructions, I've been pondering nets and casting nets, and the attitude in which we are to cast our nets, and all the rest. I'm pondering whether we are often much better than those disciples—that before we get too judgmental about them, we need to look at ourselves and ask if we have been changed and energized by Easter and all that it stands for to be willing to really put our hearts into casting some nets. I wonder if we have listened to the times when Jesus has told us that the old way of doing it maybe doesn't work, and we need to cast our nets perhaps in a different direction. I've said before that one of the occupational hazards of my job are all those questions that you're forced to wrestle with, and this week was no exception.
 - A. First, here is what I've been thinking about nets.
 - 1. Last week I said that when it comes to our discipleship, there are doors and then there are doors.
 - 2. Today I would say there are nets and then there are nets.
 - 3. When I think of fishing nets, I don't think first of those great big nets that you throw out of the boat, like those disciples were doing.
 - a) I think first of that little hand-held net that my grandpa would give me when we'd go bass fishing when I was a kid.
 - b) It was my job, after he reeled them in, to get them in the net.
 - c) And at that moment of truth, it was just me and that fish.
 - d) And I think that there are times when it's that more personal, one-to-one kind of net that we are called to throw out there.
 - e) Experts call it “relational evangelism”—casting that small net to someone we already have a relationship with—neighbor, co-worker, friend, even a family member.
 - f) And we can cast that small net in a small way—maybe just inviting someone we already know to church or a small group.

4. And then there are the bigger nets that we are to cast—you might call those the church nets.
 - a) According to a book that we have read on our VCI team (and that a number of you have read) called *Unbinding the Gospel*, you could sum this net up by saying it's the anti-Las Vegas net.
 - b) You know how they say “What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas?” In the book it says we have to have the attitude of “What happens in church **doesn't** stay in church”.
 - c) In all honesty, I wonder sometimes if Lake Harbor may be the best-kept secret in town.
 - d) We have so much good stuff going on here—from ministries for kids and youth, to Bible studies, to great worship and music and all the rest, but I'm not sure we've always done a good enough job of getting the word out, of casting those nets.
 - e) We really do have to have the attitude of “what happens in church doesn't stay in church.”
 - f) As you've heard, we've been exploring getting a new sign for out in front that might allow us to start doing a better job of that, but in the end, we are all called as members and individual “fisherpersons” to cast the church net out there, because we are so blessed here to have some really great nets to cast.
 - g) And you realize that if you like us on Facebook, not only will you get notices of what's going on here, but so will your friends—you might call that casting the electronic net.
 - h) Which points out the reality that these days there are so many ways to cast out the net, and they are often so easy to do!
- B. And then I've been pondering what is probably more important, that being the attitude with which we cast our nets. Because with this one, it becomes more about the why and the who instead of the how.
 1. And again, relationships may be the key.
 - a) Another thing we read in *Unbinding the Gospel* was when the author talked about what she called the “Trinity of Relationships” that is so vital to effective net-casting.
 - 1) And the trinity of relationships begin with the relationship that each of us has with God.
 - 2) If that relationship is healthy, then you understand that net-casting is never about us, but is about God.
 - 3) The problem with the disciples when they first started fishing was that it was all about them and how they thought it should be done, and we saw how successful that was.

- 4) If our relationship with God is healthy, then we are always praying for not just for our efforts at net-casting, but also for those we are trying to reach. And we are also always discerning how and where God might want us to be casting our nets.
 - 5) And then the second part of the trinity is the relationships that we have with each other.
 - 6) If those aren't healthy, then we lose the support for each other in our efforts,
 - 7) We also can be the best fisherpeople in the world, but if our relationships here at church with each other aren't healthy, when other folks come through the doors, they will sense that immediately. And they probably won't want to come back.
 - 8) And then finally comes the relationships that we have with other people—the people that we are casting our nets toward.
 - 9) And the author says “positively or negatively, these sets of relationships affect each other. If one area grows and gets healthier, the other areas will change...a congregation that is out of balance, with strength in one or two areas, is merely limping along.” (p. 59)
 - 10) Or to use today's image, if you're out of balance, it's hard to be a good net caster—you are more likely to get tangled in the nets rather than cast them.
 - 11) So if we are going to effectively cast our nets, the truth is that we have to constantly be growing in all three kinds of relationships—with God, with each other, and with others on the outside.
2. And then what is also clear about the attitudes in which we are to cast the nets comes from what Jesus says and does in the story.
 - a) First comes the uncomfortable part—that part about casting our nets on the other side of the boat.
 - 1) This one is uncomfortable because as hard as it may be to cast our nets to people we know or people who are the most like us, it is even harder to cast our nets on the other side of the boat, to those who may not be the kind of folks that we normally hang out with.
 - 2) I was really struggling with how to illustrate what this might look like for us as the net-casters, until I saw this video at

our worship brainstorming party a couple of weeks ago, that comes at the whole “fishing from the other side of the boat thing” from a much different perspective—namely the perspective of someone who may be found at the other side of our boat. This is aimed at young people, but at some level speaks to all of us. You might be able to put another face on the one who is speaking.

- 3) That video points out the reality that when we hesitate to fish from the other side of the boat, it’s not ourselves that we’re hurting, it is more likely to be the person that we are missing.
 - 4) And it also probably is hurting Jesus, who had this amazing courage and amazing ability to always cast his nets from the other side of the boat.
 - 5) In the story this morning, he is not asking the disciples to do something that he hadn’t already done himself countless times.
- b) The other thing to remember about this story is that when they listened to Jesus, they had success. And don’t get too wrapped up in the literal when it says there were 153 fish in the net—I don’t think anyone there that morning was actually counting—suffice to say that the number 153 was simply symbolic for “a lot”.
- 1) All of which was a reminder that when Jesus is in charge, the promise is that our net-casting will be successful.
 - 2) If we can realize that it’s always about him and not us, that should empower us to get beyond our hesitancy to cast our nets.
 - 3) And I was reading something else interesting this week when one commentator noticed that when they came up on the beach, as Peter was dragging the net full of fish, Jesus already had a fire going, and on the fire were fish. Did you ever notice that?
 - 4) It’s like he’s saying to them, “Great catch, guys, but in the end, I don’t really need you to do my fishing for me. But, I have given you the gifts and the instructions to do so, so go for it.
 - 5) Or maybe in other words, he was saying “Remember that I am not dependent on you—you are dependent on me.”

Which sort of puts all of our net-casting in proper perspective.

- 6) Or maybe it's just another case of when Jesus tells us to cast the nets, he isn't asking us to do anything he hasn't already done.

III. Conclusion

- A. Whatever we make of all of that, it is safe to say that rather than being hesitant or afraid to cast our nets, it should be a joy.
 1. Because at a personal level, we all have nets to cast, or we wouldn't be here today.
 2. And at a church level, what wonderful nets we have here at Lake Harbor to cast out to our community.
- B. And through it all, Jesus promises that if we follow him, our nets will be full.
- C. Thanks be to God for the nets, thanks be to God for the opportunities we get to cast them out into the world.

