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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Third Sunday of Easter (Series C)

April 10, 2016

Text: John 21:1–14

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Instructors of writing, ancient and modern, have always taught their students that they need to begin their literary compositions with a good introduction and a memorable conclusion. The apostle John was a good student. His gospel is introduced with a powerful prologue that lays the foundation for everything he will write about the life and deeds of the Lord Jesus: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (1:1–2, 14). The profundity of these words cannot be exhausted. Everything you read about in the rest of John's gospel concerning Jesus must be understood as the eternal, divine Word of God dwelling among us human beings in flesh and blood in order to give us truth and life.

Last week, we heard John's conclusion. It brought everything about the Lord Jesus to a pointed climax so that the reader must consider whether or not to follow the divine Word made flesh by means of catechesis, baptism, Eucharistic meal, and daily discipleship. It's John 20:30–31, “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” It's a beautiful conclusion. Will you believe in Jesus, the Son of God? This conclusion calls the reader to consider and follow unto eternal life.

But wait! There's more!! It's almost as if John says “While you're mulling over the significance of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, for your life and salvation, here's something else for you to consider. It's too good to stop now. I've got more to share.” And so we have an epilogue, of sorts, in John 21

It begins, in vs. 1, with “After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way.” This is now the third time that

Jesus has revealed Himself to His disciples after His resurrection. We heard the first two revelations last week, in John 20. On those two occasions, Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, commanded them to forgive the sins of repentant sinners, and showed them the scars of the crucifixion in His hands and side.

Here's the third time Jesus revealed Himself after the resurrection. So John tells us how seven disciples, Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James and John and two unnamed disciples decide to go fishing (vs. 2–3). According to vs. 3, the disciples worked all night and came up empty handed, no fish.

This might sound a bit familiar to you. In Luke 5:1-11, we read that Peter, James, and John had been fishing all night with no success. On that occasion, Jesus was teaching a large crowd of people. This was at the beginning of our Lord's ministry. He had not called any disciples to follow Him. Seeing Peter, the Lord asks to borrow his boat, a floating pulpit, if you will. After Jesus was finished teaching, Jesus tells Peter to let His nets down again. Peter does and catches more fish than his boat can handle. Once they get to shore, Jesus calls Peter, James, and John to be His disciples; from now on they will be fishers of men. They leave everything behind, including that great catch of fish, and follow Jesus.

Well, here they are again, 3 years later, fishing rather unsuccessfully on the Sea of Galilee. Suddenly the Lord appears on the shore and asks them a question, "Do you have any fish?" (vs. 5). After they tell Him "No", Jesus commands them to "Cast the net on the right side of the boat and you will find some" (vs. 6). Amazingly, the disciples cast their nets out once more. They don't know it's Jesus (vs. 4), yet. Don't overlook the fact that Jesus gives them a command. When the Lord speaks, things happen.

The nets are pulled in from the left side of the boat and then cast over on the right side. All of the sudden, the nets are full of fish. In the midst of the hustle and bustle, John, that disciple whom Jesus loved, leaned over to Peter and said, "Hey Peter, that's Jesus on the shore!" (vs. 7). Peter was a bit slower than John, theologically speaking. But once he got it, watch out! Peter just might do something rather impulsive.

After clothing himself more appropriately, Peter jumps into the water with reckless abandon (vs. 7). Meanwhile, the remaining six disciples trudge overflowing nets the 100 hundred yards or so back to shore.

And what do they find but Jesus cooking some fish and bread over a camp fire (vs. 9). Where did Jesus get the food? John doesn't tell us. But this is the Word made flesh who made all things in the beginning and is now risen from the dead so that He might give life to the world. Remember the introduction and conclusion!!?

The apostle John has already described other miracles of our Lord Jesus. He miraculously feed 5,000 men plus women and children with bread and fish (Jn 6). Enough has already been so that you might believe in Jesus and receive eternal life. So why include this post-resurrection miracle? Here's the key. Jesus is reminding the disciples what they are supposed to be doing. In the first two post-resurrection appearances, the Lord Jesus empowered the disciples with the Holy Spirit and commissioned them to proclaim the gospel of the forgiveness of sins.

This miraculous catch of fish is an object lesson. They are to go about their task of making disciples and bringing them to Jesus. They are supposed to be fishers of men, not fishers of fish. But if it takes a supernatural catch of 153 fish to impress upon them what they need to be doing, then, so be it. The disciples are to catch people from every nation and language using the gospel-net of Christ's death and resurrection and bring them to the Word made flesh so that they might have His eternal life and grace.

There's something important for us to know in this epilogue. When we as God's people and as God's congregation, proclaim and live out the gospel in faith and love, disciples will be brought to Jesus. The disciples caught the fish only after Jesus gave them the command and they followed His instructions. Our congregation will grow according to Jesus' word and blessing. He has given the command and the means: His Word and blessed Sacraments.

The same pattern holds true for us individually as well. We will grow in our relationship with Jesus when we follow Him on His terms and in His ways. Remember, He's the Word made flesh, crucified and risen from the dead in order to give us eternal life. Though we're baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit, we can't just cut and run and do whatever it is that we want to do. Jesus calls us to remain faithful to His Word and teaching, to His Sacraments, to prayer, to holy obedience in every area of life, to love for each other, and to His people gathered in local congregations. And what happens when we follow our Lord according to His Word and promise?

153 fish were caught in the nets. Why 153? I don't know. It certainly shows the details of an eyewitness and the catch is sudden enough and large enough to make a point. Jesus blessed it and it happened. That's the point. Go. Be my disciples and do what I've commanded and blessed. In that command and promise, you will find joy, contentment, and peace.

In a world filled with agony and disappointment, the Church has the only true message of hope. Death, despair and human atrocities cannot undo what is given to all people in Jesus. The promise of joy and peace now and for all eternity remains steadfast.

John provides an epilogue to his gospel account of the Lord Jesus Christ. A third time Jesus reveals Himself to His disciples. Through the instruction of a miraculous catch of 153 fish, the resurrected Jesus sets His Church on the right path. Sharing in His glory, power, wisdom and power, we are sent forth to live as His people who gather others together in the grace and life of Jesus. And through our Lord's promise, the Church remains steadfast and sure into the ages of ages.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.