

Going Fishing?

William C. Bradbury's sermon, April 29, 2001 (Third Sunday of Easter;)

John 21:1-19; Acts 9:1-6 (7-20); Revelation 5:11-14; Psalm 30

Last week we shared the Gospel message in a very moving musical and dramatic production. Several people told me that the presentation was so moving that it brought them to tears. I hope you didn't miss it. What a joy it is to know that God wanted to take our place on the cross. Every one of our sins has been nailed to the cross. Praise God! Well, today's message begins where the cantata ended.

The Gospel of John records four appearances of Jesus after his resurrection. The first three are recorded in the 20th chapter. The first appearance was to Mary Magdalene in the morning after His resurrection. Then, that same evening, Jesus appeared to the apostles in the upper room, but Thomas was not there. The following week He appeared again. This time he appeared all of the apostles, including Thomas. Finally, in the 21st chapter John says He appeared a fourth time, to "Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana of Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other apostles." He appeared to them by the sea of Teberias while they were fishing.

I would identify the four fishermen as Peter, James, Andrew and John as portrayed here and in the cantata by Mark Amundson, Brian Cooper, Jay Gunnarson and John Irish. A special thanks this morning to them and to the whole cast and crew who took part in the cantata.

If I would ask you, "Have you ever gone fishing?" You would, no doubt, say, "Sure I have." And if I would ask you, "Are you going again?" Some of you would say, "Sure am, want to come along." Well I want to talk about going fishing this morning. But it's probably not what you think. Let me explain.

Today a child doesn't have to go far to get lost in his or her imagination. You can get lost in a hurry by watching television or over the Internet. When I was a child, and when I was a youth for that matter, computers were just being invented and television was not yet available in the stores. We had to find things to do. But some of the things we found were not always what we knew would be acceptable by our parents. Have you been there? Maybe you identify with me?

Well this "going fishing" is doing the things I know I should not do instead of doing what I know or sense is best for me.

Focus your thoughts with me, for a few minutes, on John's Gospel ... on John 21 and the fishing trip Peter, James, Andrew, John and the others decided to take. It really started back at Simon's call, in Mathew 4:19, when Jesus said to Simon Peter and his friends, "Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men." Did you notice that he was not just speaking to Peter? He used the plural form of the word fisher ... He said "fishers."

Jesus wasn't talking to them about being fishermen. He was talking about their making disciples of men. And Simon wasn't just another fisherman either. He was a leader of fisherman! He knew where to fish and when to fish. Jesus wasn't just calling Simon to be a member in His New Kingdom. He was calling Peter to take a leadership role.

Three years later, as we see them in John 21, Peter, James, Andrew and John, and the others found themselves back at the Sea of Tiberias. But Peter led them back to fishing. Back to being fishers of fish. When Jesus questioned Peter after breakfast on that spring morning, he may not have been asking about Peter's love for the other disciples, he just may have been asking about Peter's love of fishing ... for his former occupation. You, see Peter had been called to lead men into the ministry of making disciples, but Peter decided to go on a fishing trip instead. He went back to his former love; away from the thing he was asked to do. He was being asked to move from

knowing what was expected of him to doing what was expected, from knowledge to obedience, from profession of faith to commitment.

Peter was struggling with his natural desire do the very thing he was asked not to do. Let me say it in another way. We have within us the desire to do what we want to do with our lives instead of following God's will. The desire to do our own will was present at our birth and it has not gone away. It's the desire to do our will instead of the desire to fulfill the purpose for which God gave us life, our call.

Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me?" Peter answered, "Yes Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus was asking Peter if he loved him enough to lead those men into ministry. Was he willing to answer Jesus' call on his life?

Listen up young people! Jesus came into my heart when I was your age. Adults I'm not just talking about these little ones, these physically little ones. I'm also talking about the spiritually little ones here. Jesus was my real role model. But even then we had other people who served as models or heroes in our lives.

My other role models were my pastor, my church school teachers and radio drama heroes; fictitious people like Tom Mix, the Lone Ranger and Captain Midnight. The ones you would probably think of would be public figures, maybe even sports "heroes." Other role models are all around us in ways we don't even think about. Or in ways we have to think about to realize they are even there. People whom we admire and respect. People like a Sunday school teacher, maybe a teacher or coach at school, or maybe your pastor or maybe someone in your own family. These are the people who show us a pattern of behavior, an example of a way to live. Sometimes they fail us; they make the wrong choices too. Sometimes even they "go fishing." But they try not to do it too often. Remember Jesus is the only perfect role model.

Peter wasn't the only biblical person to decide to go "fishing." Jonah was called to preach to the people of Ninevah. What did he do? He went on a boat ride in the opposite direction. Then there was Saul. King Saul went on a personal ego trip. He

decided to do his own thing instead of following instructions. He offered his own sacrifice instead of waiting for Samuel.

I can remember when I was young and my parents sent me to church. I knew that Jesus had called me to loving and honoring him with my life. But I decided to go "fishing" instead. I decided not to go to church even though God had called me to a life of obedience. I decided to lead my parents into thinking that I had gone to church. Then Jesus asked me, "Do you love me?" It hurt. I knew I was wrong.

Maybe you've been tempted with drugs or tobacco. Maybe you've been tempted with sex or alcohol. Maybe you've even been tempted to "go fishing" with pornography. Some of these have been put in front of me too. Fortunately I had decided, by that time, that my body was the temple of Holy Spirit and that I didn't want to destroy our relationship, my relationship with Jesus. I heard Jesus say, "Do you love me?"

Young people; some of you just came back from Acquire the Fire. Did you make a commitment like Peter? Are you going to work at keeping that commitment?

What really is happening is that Satan is trying to get us to do what he wants us to do instead of what Jesus wants us to do with our lives. We've become comfortable doing Satan's work. It seems satisfying, doesn't it. But we are only fooling ourselves when we do it. When Peter went fishing, he wasn't satisfied. When Paul was hunting young Christians as blasphemers, he wasn't satisfied. Neither was I satisfied when I was doing the things that I knew were contrary to those I saw in my role models. And Jesus asked me again, "Do you love me?" So how are you responding to Jesus? You accepted him as your role model when you accepted the promise made at your baptism.

It is not a matter of whether I'm asking you to do something or not. Ask yourself, "What is God calling me to do." Then ask, "What is He calling Bethany to do?" Remember you are Bethany! Think about it, how are you going to respond? How are we going to respond ... you as an individual or we as a body. We can choose to respond like Mary, not questioning if it can be done, but how am I ... or we, going to make it happen (with God's help of course). The alternatives are to respond like Moses, reluctantly; like

Elijah, with fear and run for our lives; like Isaiah, denying our abilities; like Jeremiah, saying I'm only a child; like Amos, I'm just a farmer, or; like Jonah, and run in the opposite direction and when we do respond, to pout about it. And Jesus asks again, "Do you love me?"

Maybe I need to ask myself, "Why did God create me? Maybe I need to ask God, "Why did you create me? What purpose did you have in mind when you created me?" Now don't take a fishing trip like Jonah. Ask some questions. Listen for His answers, not your answers. So, we have all been on "fishing trips." We have all done our own thing. Now Jesus is asking you, and me, one more time, "Do you love me?"

Do you, like me, feel hurt that you are asked again, "Do you, truly love Jesus?" Can you honestly say, "Yes, Lord Jesus, you know that I love you!" What will His answer be? You already know it. "Feed my sheep!"

You are invited to come here to pray about our habit of "Going Fishing" and our desire to "Feed His sheep."

Amen.