

John 21:1-14 | After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. <sup>2</sup> Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. <sup>3</sup> Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will go with you.” They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

<sup>4</sup> Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup> Jesus said to them, “Children, do you have any fish?” They answered him, “No.” <sup>6</sup> He said to them, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. <sup>7</sup> That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. <sup>8</sup> The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.

<sup>9</sup> When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” <sup>11</sup> So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn. <sup>12</sup> Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” Now none of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup> Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. <sup>14</sup> This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

## John 21:1-14 | Easter 2023

The resurrection stories are some of the strangest and most moving in all of the scriptures. Jesus announces his return to life in a myriad of ways but none of them like I’d expect. The only king I’ve seen announce a comeback in my lifetime was in 2009 in southeast London. The King of Pop, Michael Jackson had been more than ten years without touring and he came to announce “This is It.” Huge fanfare, previously scheduled programming interrupted, weeping fans. If I’m on Jesus’ PR team, I’m thinking something like that.

Instead we see an unimportant city, a group of unsuccessful fishermen, and that immortal opening question, “Have any fish?” So small, so ordinary, yet it ends with the unthinkable conclusion in the hearts of the disciples, “They knew it was the Lord.” How do you arrive at a conclusion like that?

### 1. Fishing

Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael and the sons of Zebedee, and two others were all gathered together one night beside the Sea of Tiberius. This group of seven of Jesus’

disciples had spent the past three years with Jesus. They're no longer in Jerusalem, the feast had ended. Jesus is dead, and they're back home. What do we do now?

John 21:3 Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Simon Peter, always the first among the disciples to act, the obvious leader of the rest of the group says it first. "I'm going fishing." And quickly the other disciples follow suit. "We will go with you." They went out and got the boat and that night they caught nothing. Before Jesus arrived into their lives they fished. Now Jesus was dead. What's changed? What did those three years mean? They had marched triumphantly into Jerusalem with Christ as their heroic king, a week later he was hung on a cross and then buried.

What did it mean that Peter decided to go fishing? This is a return to life before Christ. Perhaps the last three years will just be strange memories. That night they caught nothing. The disciples are in the dark of night laboring away with nothing to show for it but futility and despair. Now I know you might be thinking, relax its one night without some fish. But its worse than that, in the death of Christ there future is gone, and in their fruitless night of fishing they can't even return to their past. This is where Christ meets his people.

How often is our work just a coping mechanism? Their fishing is coping with despair. Outside of Christ we live in different stages of that night of fishing. The optimism of first setting out. The frustration of midnight when we still have no catch. The futility of the night being over and reality of heading into shore with nothing of value in hand. Don't mistake your excellent coping strategy with a life of meaning. When the sun rises on life outside of Christ it only reveals futility. It is in this place that we must face the most brutal questions of life.

Ivan Karamazov knew it, as did Kierkegaard and the author of Job before them both: Every human loss, every pain, every undeserved tear, every act of malice puts a question mark over the cosmos. What kind of world is this where such things happen? If there is a God, what kind of God is this who allows such things, or, what seems worse, does more than allow? - Peter Leithart.

It is in this place, into this despairing question of the pain and futility of life, where we are equal parts trapped by our past and cut off from our future, that Christ arrives. In John's gospel he arrives with the dawn, a light breaking into the darkness.

## 2. Jesus' Arrival

John 21:4-5 Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup> Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered him, "No."

In the twilight they can't distinguish the man on the shore. He asks them, "have any fish." We don't have any fish. If you don't see that you don't have any fish right now, you'll miss what he does next. If you don't face the question of the futility and suffering of every life ending in death you won't be surprised by the life.

John 21:6 He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish.

John, the author of this memory pieces it together first and then tells Peter. I'll read it because it is a sweet moment. Like forest Gump when he spots Lieutenant Dan, he jumps into the water.

John 21:7 That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea.

### 3. Three Responses

John 21:9-10 When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught."

Jesus has a meal already prepared for the hungry fisherman. The charcoal is lit, bread and fish are grilling in the morning sun. Jesus gives the meal, and invites the disciples to share in the abundance. They haul in the catch, 153 large fish, miraculously the nets don't break.

John 21:12 Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord.

The man who told them where the fish were, the one who had breakfast prepared for them, whom they sat and ate with and who served them and not the other way around. They don't dare ask his identity. They knew it was the Lord. Look at the interior experience this text gives us. They are looking at something that they know, and in a sense want to ask him, "Lord is it you?" But the plainness of reality that they are sitting with Jesus prevents them from even asking, they know the truth but while they know it they recognize their knowing something impossible, a dead man eating, and something transcendent, the dead man eating is the Lord.

And here is the answer to that great question of the futility of life. They knew Jesus is the Lord. That means all the fish they've ever caught were from him. All the nights they never caught a fish was his prodding them to look for him. All the pains and sufferings were evidence that things were wrong. That we were wrong. But Jesus enters into this very futility and despair of lives of sin in denial of God. And he bears our suffering, enters our futility, and by death destroys death itself.