

Charles R. Blaisdell, Senior Pastor  
First Christian Church  
Colorado Springs, Colorado  
April 28, 2013  
©2013

## You Want Us To Do What?!? 3. What's In Your Net?

John 21:1-14 NRSV 21...Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. 2Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. 3Simon 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. 4Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." 6He said to them, "Cast the net to 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 there were so many fish. 7That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. 8But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off. 9When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. 10Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." 11So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. 12Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. 13Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. 14This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

The last two moves that Barbara and I made were trans-oceanic ones. First to Hawaii and then, five years later, back to the mainland. Now, we've moved a lot in our lives. If you count college residences, I have lived in nineteen different houses or apartments, in seven states, in eight cities, since I was eighteen. Each of those places required a move, of course, and some were as simple as moving to a different dorm, an endeavor that required a couple of hours. Others were cross-town moves with lots of

pickup loads and imposing on friends. And some were cross-country via moving vans with the final items that seem to breed in the house your moving from when you're not looking, tossed into the back of the car. But moving across the Pacific Ocean is different. For one thing, all those little things that do seem to breed as you think you're getting near the end can't simply be thrown in the back of the car – because the car is already somewhere on a barge in the middle of the ocean. For another thing, you learn to cull and cull and cull because the cost of the move is based on weight. But that cost is also based on volume and the more room your stuff takes up in the oceangoing container, the more the move will cost. The friendly folks of Royal Hawaiian Movers were very attuned to this reality when we moved here and they were geniuses at getting things into nooks and crannies.

But that genius came at a cost. I remember after the mover had unloaded the shipping container here that I wanted to get my desk assembled. Barbara is wonderful at making detailed inventory of what's in what box, but when you have five guys packing your stuff you don't catch everything. And while I quickly found the carton that had the parts to the metal and glass desk in it, the hardware – the screws and bolts – were nowhere to be found. I tried everything I could think of – maybe that hardware was in one of the boxes that had the books from the room. No luck. Maybe they had packed that hardware with some of the other hardware and tools from the garage. No luck. I kept casting my net, as it were, in a variety of different places that I thought might make some sense, but I finally had to go to Ace and buy new bolts and screws. Months later as I opened a box with lampshades in it, there was the baggy with all the hardware, tucked into the space inside the lampshade. No wonder my net had continually come

up empty. I am still not sure what led them to put bolts with lampshades other than it was simply a free space where something fit.

Or consider those occasions when you lose something, let's say your car keys. You look and look. You cast your net this way and that. No luck. And by the way, one of the most unhelpful phrases ever uttered is when you say to someone "I've lost my car keys" and that person says "Well, where did you last have them?" Well, duh! If I knew where I last had them, they wouldn't be lost, now, would they? So you keep looking, imagining more and more farfetched places that you might have put them, casting your net more and more widely and desperately.

We all know what it feels like to come up empty-handed when looking for something in the places we think it should be, the places where it would make sense, the places that are obvious. We know the frustration of not finding, the creeping crazy-making that that search can entail. The symbolism in this morning's scripture, the almost final appearance of the Risen Jesus to the disciples as we continue our post-Easter sermon series concerning those appearances and the instructions Jesus offered in those encounters, is pretty obvious, isn't it? Peter has been fishing all night long has caught nothing, his search has been fruitless. But by the light of the new day, and the light of Jesus' words, he now casts the net in a new place and ends up with more fish than he ever imagined could fit in one net, one-hundred and fifty three of them, in fact, to use the gospel writer's curiously exact tally. As I say, although the symbolism here isn't very complicated, sometimes we need to be reminded of the simple things, don't we? In this story, Peter and the disciples had gone back to their previous vocations. Instead of believing those women at the tomb who told them that death had not

defeated God's hopes in Jesus, they ignored that news – not the first time men would ignore women trying to tell them the truth, by the way. Instead of believing and re-orienting their lives, continuing the ministry that Jesus had called them to, they gave it all up and went back to what they knew. But it wasn't satisfying, they weren't achieving anything, their nets kept coming up empty and the story reinforces that sense of loss, of despair, of seeking but not finding by emphasizing that this was happening during the night. Not only were they not finding in the places they were now looking, they couldn't really see because of the darkness all around them. But then they do. When they once again follow Jesus' directions not only is it now daylight, they can now see again, but they now know a kind of abundance, a kind of purpose, a kind of new meaning for their lives that had eluded them as they cast their nets in vain in the wrong places. For Jesus had told them elsewhere, you may remember, that by following him they would be "fishers of people," continuing the ministry he had entrusted to them.

As I have read and re-read and reflected on this story this week, it struck me that there are indeed times when you and I are casting our nets in the wrong places and it is no wonder we come up empty. Or, to vary the image a bit, we cast our nets frantically and come up with a net full of stuff that is not helpful and is only a burden – sort of like the old cliché about the fisherman who keeps reeling in old boots and trash and then has to deal with fouled lines and stuff that doesn't satisfy. Let me give an example of what I'm talking about:

Like some, perhaps many, of you, I spent last Friday glued to the tv and the internet, watching the scary saga of the hunt for the Boston bombers. And my net was full, very full, full to the point of bursting. But here's the thing I realized later: so much of

that net was full of stuff that was wrong, inaccurate, and inflammatory. Or as one writer put it, considering the sheer volume of Tweets, Facebook postings, cable news updates, and live blogging, it was “Total Noise, Only Louder”!<sup>1</sup> If you, like me, found yourself being filled with all these things that day then you also found things like media that inaccurately and utterly unfairly labeled two innocent students as suspects, that added to a family’s pain with speculation that a missing college daughter from Brown University was somehow caught up in this, that inaccurately reported that a suspect had been arrested, that said that police were searching for two “brown-skinned” suspects thus playing into the racism and xenophobia that too readily lurks not far beneath the surface of our civic life these days. That net was full and bursting, wasn’t it, and full of all kinds of species of what fishermen would call “trash fish.”

The following day I read an article that said that if you had **not** followed the moment-by-moment the manhunt on Friday, had remained oblivious of it, and instead read about the whole thing on Saturday morning that you would have known just as much as those who hauled around those huge nets of misinformation on Friday, and, moreover, you would have had a whole day in which you could have done some good for God. Ouch. That convicted me. And it reminded me that in the midst of a life that is indeed too full of noise sometimes, I need to walk away from the seductive siren song that the instant internet promises, I need to remember that too often truth gets lost in the midst of such times. I need to remember to cast my net in the right place, and sometimes that will mean walking away from the computer, the television, logging out of Facebook and Twitter. What about you?

---

<sup>1</sup><http://nymag.com/news/intelligencer/boston-manhunt-2013-4/>

Now, maybe that's not where you are tempted to cast your net. Maybe you are casting your net elsewhere but in ways that are just as unfruitful, just as unhelpful, just as soul-deadening. Maybe you keep finding your net full of resentments that you can't get past, old hurts that continue to fester, old angers that you know you should have moved beyond but can't figure out how. What net do you drag onto that beach? What is it full of? Or maybe your net is empty. Maybe you keep casting your net in places hoping that your life will change but when you haul it back in, nothing has changed and you don't know how to make it happen. Maybe you are one who, like those disciples, seems to do your fishing in the middle of the night when it seems that the regrets and the what-if's find it so much easier to fill your net.

But that is not where the story leaves us, is it? It is not where the story leaves the disciples. It is not where the story leaves Peter. No, by the light of a new day, by the light of Christ's continuing presence with those disciples and with you and me, we can indeed be taught how to fish differently, we can be taught where our nets need to go and where they don't. We can fill those nets with nourishing and life-giving hopes, and dreams and patterns and traits and habits instead of those things that do not satisfy, that leave us empty and exhausted. And that's what happened with Peter. He changed. His net became full of good and life-giving things. He was able to move beyond the regrets and the failures to new life, new hope, new ministry – and from this most unlikely-seeming man the Church would begin its life on Pentecost, spurred on by Peter's powerful preaching. He would go on to organize the Jerusalem church; he would figure out ways to make sure the widows and orphans were fed and cared for. Unlike that night when he denied Jesus three times, he would stand up to the Roman

authorities. He changed. He changed. His net was now full and he was fed and so he could now feed others.

And so, as one preacher puts it, in this story both Peter and “We are given the grace of another day so that God's expectation for our lives can be met. We are given the grace of another day so that we can start anew to live out our hopes.”<sup>2</sup> This story this morning comes to us a word of challenge and opportunity: to change what needs changing so that God’s purpose in your life can be ever more realized. But will need to accept Christ’s invitation to cast our nets in new places, to fill those nets with new things, to honestly ask ourselves what is in our nets now and what could be there if we will indeed but accept that invitation. Will you accept his invitation?

---

<sup>2</sup>From <http://day1.org/1039-the-grace-of-another-day>