

TITLE: "Strange Things Can Happen While Fishing" (Slide #1)

TEXT: John 21:1-18

DATE: April 6, 2008

I. INTRODUCTION.

A. **Opening Illustration: A Miraculous Catch (Slide #2)**

Funny things can happen to a person when fishing. Pattie Boyles tells the story of a woman by the name of Ruth who shared a testimony at a women's conference in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. The woman had decided that she'd like to go to the women's conference, which takes place every two years. In January 2006, a whole year and a half ahead of the event, she told her unsaved husband she'd like to go and ask for his financial help. He told her that their money was for their house and food only and that he wouldn't help. She responded by telling him of her love and respect. She started praying and saving a kina (30 cents) here and a 20 toea (less than a penny) there. The money went into a bag for saving without it being counted. During the month of October, a year prior to the conference, and after much prayer, she requested her husband's financial help again. He agreed that he'd go fishing and give her the proceeds. However, he required that she go with him and bring her money bag in the canoe. They fished from 6 AM to noon and caught nothing. Then the husband asked to count his wife's money. Instead of counting it, he tossed the bag overboard in frustration. She did not retaliate, but again told him of her love for him despite what he had just done. At that moment, their net filled with fish and they returned to shore with a full catch. The husband told her to go sell the rest.

She had saved the biggest fish for her family. That night, when it was time to prepare the fish, she took a knife to cut it open. When she cut it open, inside the belly of the fish she found the money bag. Humbled and convicted by this miracle, her husband asked his wife to call the pastor to pray with him. He asked Jesus into his heart. The husband is now serving God and the woman was able to attend the conference with his blessing.

B. **(Slide #3)** Strange things. . . even miraculous things. . . can happen when fishing.

C. Think with me about another fishing story that took place long ago:

1. The story is told in John 21, a time shortly after the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.
2. On the surface it's an amazing story, but not much more than that.
3. But when we think about it a little more, it is first of all a very strange account. . . and then a miraculous account.

D. Consider with me the oddity of this account – the nonsensical nature of what is taking place in John 21. Simply put, what we see the disciples doing makes absolutely no sense at all. . . unless you really think about it.

1. The unfolding drama the disciples had experienced over the past couple of weeks was extraordinary.
2. From the highs of Palm Sunday to the lows of the Cross back to the highs of Jesus' appearance in the Upper Room, not just once but twice.
3. Jesus has entered triumphantly into Jerusalem, but the crowd turns on Him, He is falsely accused, whipped, spat upon, mocked, and nailed to a Cross, but He conquers death and the grave and is making appearances.
4. You would expect that the natural reaction of the disciples would be to rally together again, pick back up the banner that they had been carrying, walk in the convictions that were theirs, but that is

not what they are doing.

5. As John 21 opens we find the disciples gathered not at a pep rally or setting up Resurrection headquarters or any other dynamic thing; they are out at the Sea of Tiberius.
6. The events must have gone something like this:
 - a. The text tells us that they are gathered by the Sea of Tiberius. Perhaps they began skipping rocks or watching the waves come in and out, seemingly bored and trying to come up with something to do.
 - b. Peter finally speaks up and offers a suggestion: *"I'm going fishing? Anyone want to join me?"*
 - c. The others were equally lost and so they without hesitation responded, *"We'll go with you."*
 - d. And so, as one might expect from Jesus' followers after Jesus has just accomplished the greatest feat ever known to mankind (sarcasm), they all get in a boat and set out for an entire night of fishing.
- E. Let me be sure that I am not misunderstood here.
 1. There is nothing wrong with fishing.
 2. As a matter of fact, there are many people - many of you here today - that would rank fishing right up there as among the most relaxing and enjoyable things one can do.
 3. Even though I don't personally fish, let me go on record as saying that I think fishing is an excellent sport and involves a lot of skill and time to do it right.
 4. There is absolutely nothing wrong with fishing. But let's be honest, folks, fishing is not exactly what you would expect to see the disciples doing after the Resurrection of Christ from the dead.
- F. Why? Simply this: The emotional highs and lows of the events surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection had so worn them out emotionally that they had totally lost all perspective in life and just couldn't figure out what to do.
 1. They had lost their purpose in life.
 2. They were confused.
 3. Their vision for life was blurry and out of focus and so they had lapsed into the ordinary and the natural instead of the extraordinary and supernatural that Christ had to offer.
- G. Let's not be hard on the disciples. As we will see in a few moments in this sermon, perhaps we too at Christ Community Church are guilty of the same thing.
- H. So what does Jesus do to help the disciples. He offers to them two things in John 21:
 1. Two Word Pictures.
 2. A Directive.

II. **(Slide #4) AS JESUS APPEARED TO THE DISCIPLES BY THE SEA OF TIBERIAS, HE FIRST OFFERS TO THEM WORD PICTURES**

- A. On the surface, the story that John tells is a simple one, but it is a story filled with meaning - symbolisms are everywhere in this account.
- B. **(Slide #5)** As has already been established, the disciples had decided to go fishing - an activity that was extremely familiar for most of them for they were fishermen by profession when Jesus found them.
- C. As they fished through the night, much to their chagrin, they were unable to catch a thing.
 1. It was bad enough that they had lost direction and were lapsing back into old habits.
 2. Now even their old habits were not reaping any rewards.
 3. And to add injury to insult, some stranger was yelling from the shore asking them if they had caught anything and they had to admit that even though they were seasoned fishermen, they had not caught a thing all night.

4. And to make it even worse, the stranger was yelling suggestions to them and they knew how to fish - ***"Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some."*** the stranger said.
- D. Nothing else had worked and so they did as the stranger said and to their amazement their nets were inundated with fish.
- E. To any other group of fishermen, this event would have been amazing, but it meant even more to this group of disciples because it offered to them a word picture that jarred their memories. This event had happened before.
- F. The one who was having the flash back the most was the one that it made the most sense to - Peter, for it was he who first experienced a scene just like this as recorded in ***Luke 5***.
1. In this case the water was the Lake of Gennsaret.
 2. In this case the fisherman was an uneducated, unconverted, fisherman by the name of Simon before He received his new name in Christ.
 3. In this case, Peter had already come to shore and was asked to go back out and cast the net that resulted in a huge catch.
 4. And in this case, in the end, Jesus made this declaration: ***"Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men."***
- G. I may be reading too much between the lines, but I don't think so.
1. Peter and the others had lost their vision - they had abandoned their call.
 2. Passion week had messed them up.
 3. Peter himself had messed up more than any of them and certainly he must have felt like he was no longer even a member of the discipleship team.
- H. The word picture Jesus had to offer was powerfully effective.
1. It reminded them of another day – a greater day.
 2. It created a flash-back to the beginning when Jesus recruited them as disciples and started them on a three year journey that was the most exciting days of their lives.
 3. It planted within them a new spark – Jesus is calling us again, He is renewing the vision, He still trusts us to get the job done.
- I. Jesus' word picture marked a new beginning, a fresh call, a renewed awareness of the task, and the reaction was immediate:
1. Peter shouted out: It's Jesus.
 2. Just like the day when Jesus came walking on the water, Peter jumped out of the boat to come to Jesus with the other disciples following in the boat.
 3. The word picture worked, it jarred their memories, it renewed a spark.
- J. The beauty of this scene is that in Jesus' eyes, the call was still there - He still trusted them to get the job done as the first apostles of the good news.
1. If the church were to continue, Jesus was still counting on them.
 2. If the gospel was to be spread, it would be by the same ones Jesus called from the very beginning.
 3. Sure they ran, sure they denied Him, sure they messed up big time, but it was time to put down the fishing poles and take up the gospel again because the call was still there.
- K. This great moment marked a second key resurrection: **THE RESURRECTION OF VISION WITHIN JESUS DISCIPLES.**
- L. **(Slide #6)** As the story continues Jesus introduces a second word picture that would resonate with those He had just called from the lake.
1. As the disciples made their way to shore, there they found Jesus tending a fire that had burned down to the white coals that are perfect for cooking.

2. Over the fire Jesus was cooking fresh fish – nothing better than a fish freshly caught.
 3. We are told in the account that the disciples dearly wanted to ask if the man in front of them was Jesus – they were certain that it was, but they just wanted to hear it.
 4. “Come have breakfast,” Jesus said, and so they gathered round.
 5. With hearts racing Jesus offers a second word picture that for any other crowd would have meant nothing. We read in verse 13, “Jesus came, took bread and gave it to them. . . .”
 - a. The flash back had to be taking place. . . .now to a time that was not from the beginning of their time with Jesus, but on from the very end.
 - b. They must have had a flash that went through there minds about the last time something like this happened.
 - c. It was in a room prepared for the Passover meal, they were crowded around a table, and the account as recorded by look is almost identical: “And He took bread, gave thanks, and broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’” (Luke 22:19)
 6. How could any of them not think about that intimate moment – a last moment – with Jesus when He would eat with them the last time and state His mission one more time: I’m going to have my body broken and my blood spilt for the redemption of the world.
 7. He said to them then that this was the last meal He would have with them “the mission finds fulfillment in the Kingdom of God.” (Luke 22:16)
 8. This is that moment, the mission has been fulfilled, and they are eating together again.
- M. Don’t you find it fascinating that Jesus, before He presented one of His final words while on earth, understood the importance of connecting again with His disciples on an emotional level – that’s always done best with word pictures.
- N. As we continue to read, the story moves from word picture to a directive.

III. (Slide #7) AS JESUS APPEARED TO THE DISCIPLES BY THE SEA OF TIBERIAS, HE RESTATES THE COMMISSION.

- A. While they must have been thrilled to see Jesus, one would have to think that half of the disciples thoughts were remembering the way in which I had disappeared when the chips were down and Jesus was being led away to be crucified.
 1. Yes, I wanted to see Jesus, but it would be embarrassing.
 2. Yes, Jesus still meant the world to me, but I deserved to be chewed out big time and I wouldn’t be too excited about it.
 3. How embarrassing to have been prepared so well by Jesus and still come out completely blind and so incompetent.
- B. As each one reached the shore they saw the same seemingly incongruent scene:
 1. They were nervous and expecting a rebuke; Jesus was calm and awaiting a time of fellowship.
 2. They expected their food to be instruction, but instead their food was fresh caught fish.
 3. They expected a glare and instead, I believe, got a smile of welcome.
 4. The last words they expected from the mouth of Jesus was, ***“Come and have breakfast.”***
 5. What they expected and what they received were opposites.
- C. As they gathered around the fire with Jesus – enjoying things like they used to be – Jesus moves from word pictures to directive, and He centers the conversation in upon Peter, the rock upon which He said He would build His church.
- D. The unfolding drama has a high level of discomfort:

1. He looks Peter in the eye and says: “Simon, do you love me.”
 2. Peter responds: Of course.
 3. Again Jesus says: Do you love me?
 4. Again Peter responds affirmatively.
 5. Then a third time the question is asked: “Simon do you love me.”
 6. Embarrassed and hurt Peter again says: Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”
 7. After each question and answer Jesus declares to Peter: “Feed my sheep.”
- E. Much is made out of the three questions and there is a ton of speculation about why Jesus did that – I’m not interested in any of that this morning.
- F. What seems more important in this text is that Jesus makes this connector for Peter: If you love me then you will do what I have asked you to do: Feed lost sheep.
- G. The word pictures undoubtedly reminded them of their original call into ministry.
- H. The commission Jesus was now giving was meant to remind them of the task that was central to their call:
1. In **Luke 5** the task was described as “becoming fishers of men.”
 2. In **Luke 22** the Last Supper served notice that all that Jesus came to do was all about “fishing for men – redeeming the world.
 3. The task stated by Christ in this account has not changed: “find and feed lost sheep.”
- I. How interesting that after a few other words in reference to Peter’s future, the story ends with some very familiar words – words identical to their original call: “Follow me.” (**Verse 19**)
- J. Folks, first in a word pictures and second in a commission Jesus makes it clear: The vision of the Kingdom of God has not changed nor will it ever change – It’s all about seeking and finding lost sheep.
- K. Now listen to this key thought for it is vitally important for all of us to grasp this morning: How easy it can be to experience lows after key events such as Christmas and Easter if our focus is upon events. What Jesus is in essence doing in this account is reminding the disciples and us that the Kingdom of God is not about events, its all about mission.
1. While the birth of Christ is significant, it is not the event that God desires for us to celebrate – it’s the beginning of mission.
 2. While the miracles of Jesus are significant, it is not the miracles that God desires for us to celebrate – it is changed lives.
 3. While the death and resurrection of Christ are sacred and holy, it is not the events of the Cross and the Empty Tomb that God desires for us to celebrate – it is the accomplishment of the mission and the promise of salvation for all who would believe that we are to celebrate.
 4. The events are many and varied, but the vision is ONE: The kingdom of God and all of its activity has only one purpose – the redemption of the world.
 5. The events in the unfolding drama are many, but the focus is singular: It’s all about winning the lost to Christ and the establishing of the masses as His disciples. It’s all about redemption. It’s one story. It’s one call.

IV. (**Slide #8**) A WORD FOR CHRIST COMMUNITY CHURCH.

- A. As I said earlier in the sermon, it would be easy to come down hard on the disciples and maybe even say something like, “I’m sure glad Jesus set them straight.”
- B. But to be honest, we are very much like them. . . . and we needed to look at this story as a word to us.
- C. Within the past five years we as a church have experienced something like the disciples emotionally and have in many ways reacted in the same way they did. WE STAND IN NEED OF A WORD FROM THE

LORD.

- D. Over the past five years we have been through some significant times.
- E. For years we planned for the construction of a new place for worship and for mission and through literally dozens of miracles God has given to us this amazing place to gather.
- F. I can remember the excitement leading up to the time when we would move in and I can remember the huge crowd that gathered in the early days of inhabiting this place.
- G. But it wasn't long until the excitement of all that God had done for us began to wear off.
 - 1. The crowds began to diminish.
 - 2. The joy began to fade away.
 - 3. Some even began to grumble about wanting to be coddled again like before.
 - 4. The reason why we built this new building – to reach even more within our community with the gospel – began to fade into the background.
 - 5. Amazingly, instead of growing we began to shrink – some moved away, others left the church for another church feeling perhaps feeling like we weren't meeting their needs, and so grumbling started. . . . giving even went down.
 - 6. I must confess: when this began to happen I grew very disillusioned because in my mind “the resurrection had happened and the church just wanted to go fishing.”
 - 7. For several months I felt very discouraged by this turn of events and have expressed that to you on at least one occasion.
 - 8. But I must say that as I have been thinking about this account in John 21, my heart has soften because I now realize that sometimes when we go through really emotional times we can get a little disoriented and have the tendency to go back to what is familiar.
- H. **(Slide #9)** Listen to the word from the Lord today:
 - 1. **(Slide #10)** Jesus is saying to us: “throw the nets on the other side of the boat,” remember the original call and the statement “I will make you fishers of men.”
 - 2. **(Slide #11)** Jesus is saying to us: “take the break and eat it;” remember the mission of Christ to win lost people.
 - 3. **(Slide #12)** Perhaps Jesus would even say: “remember my last words before I ascended into heaven: I'm going to send you another gift for the purpose of sharing the gospel with Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the world.”
- I. Nothing has changed! Everything that pertains to Christ is still all about the mission – to win the world.
- J. I'm not coming down on anyone this morning. I'm just feeling the need to have a moment like Jesus had with His disciples in John 21 when He said: If you love me you will do what I care about – win the lost.
- K. As we take communion this morning, may the event remind us of the mission and may we say to Jesus: sorry, I just lost focus for a little bit. I'm going to be about the mission again. Jesus would be pleased.
- L. **(Slide #13)** COMMUNION: LET US TAKE TIME TO REMEMBER. . .AND RESPOND.