

April 28th 2013 "Fishing With An Expert" John 21:1-14

The story we have just read from John 21 is the longest and most practical of all the resurrection appearances of Jesus to His disciples. It is Jesus back to His pre-crucifixion best. Jesus once again performing amazing miracles. But it is not the same as it was before because Jesus is different. He was dead and is alive. He is no longer the companion that those disciples spent most of the hours of every day with, but the Lord who suddenly and unexpectedly manifests Himself before them.

Indeed the actual word manifested is used by John twice in John 21:1 when he talks about Jesus' appearing.

"After this Jesus **manifested** Himself again to the disciples on the sea of Tiberias; and He **manifested** Himself in this way"

And that word manifested means to shed light on something or someone so that you can now see what was previously hidden. So John seems to be telling us that the resurrected Jesus was always with His disciples but they could not see Him. YET at special times He would reveal Himself to them so they could see Him in His physical form. He would manifest Himself to them. And whenever He did so it was to teach them or encourage them.

I believe He does both on this occasion.

First I reckon that His manifested presence that day in that very location was a reminder to them of something that had happened between them some years before. We read about it in Matthew 4:18

And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

And he said unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.

With regards to them becoming fishers of men, the word here is definitely 'make'. The promise Jesus gave them was not that by following Him they would become fishers of men. Nor that they would gain the skills needed to

make themselves effective fishers of men. But that He would make them fishers of men.

Now way back in Luke chapter 5 we read of a time when Jesus had made them fishers of fish. It was close to the beginning of His ministry when after using Peter's boat as a floating platform from which He could talk to the crowds, He told Peter and co to push out into deeper water and to let down their nets for a catch. Peter especially didn't want to do this seeing they had fished all through the previous night and caught nothing, but begrudging they did, and when they pulled the net back up they had caught so many fish that the nets started to break and the boat to sink.

This really made Peter realize what a sinner he was in the presence of Jesus. But it also gave them all the courage to continue following Jesus and learning from Him.

And here, after His death and resurrection, Jesus again makes them fishers of fish, for they will now need even more courage to fulfill their mission. But through this miracle He also shows them that the power to be fishers of men will not come from themselves but from Him. They will not be fruitless fishermen of souls because He will be with them, directing them and empowering them.

In a physical sense they obeyed His direction to cast the net on the right side and were amazed with what happened. And in like manner, if they obey His directions, rely on His power and His presence, they will see an amazing spiritual harvest of souls for their labours.

For them that day Jesus was indeed The Fisherman's Friend, and He is still that for us when it comes to you and me being Fishers of Men. He is the Expert Fisherman who is always alongside us, giving us the power to succeed and whispering His directions into our hearts. When we obey and trust Him, He will make us fishers of men in the most unexpected ways and most unexpected places.

Second, Jesus made this an opportunity for Him to feed them. To see a coal fire burning with some bread and fish cooking on it was not just a pleasant surprise but a sign of His care and concern for them. Jesus does not just want us in His kingdom so that we can be constantly working for Him. He wants to feed us, and to care for us, and to give us spiritual and physical nourishment when we need it most.

I have a very special memory that goes back to the time when as a boy of 11 living in England, I would spend my Saturday mornings working for our local milkman. I recall meeting him at the top of our road at 5.30am on many a cold winters morning. And he would have this electric milk truck and I would ride with him in the open cab, and whenever he stopped I would take the milk to the doorsteps and pick up the empty bottles. Then at about 10.30 we would stop for a break. And he would bring out huge doorstep sandwiches and a hot mug of tea, both for him and me. And as we ate we would chat. That was a highlight for me because it showed me that he cared for me. I wasn't just there to be his runner but to be the little friend who he wanted to work alongside him, and here I see Jesus doing something similar.

And it made me wonder whether we realize how much Jesus delights in those times when we and Him sit down together and he feeds us from His word.

Jesus gave His friends breakfast. He sustained them physically at the beginning of their day even as He would continually sustain them with spiritual food throughout the rest of their lives. And He promise to do the same for us.

And personally I would have to add here, that for me there is something really wonderful about the way the Lord sustains me—particularly when I meet with Him at the beginning of each new day.

Then Third, the miracle itself stands as a parable of what the disciples will do for the kingdom in the future as they obey Him and walk in His way.

For when Jesus stands on the water's edge and asks them about their catch of fish He addresses them with a beautiful Greek word that means 'children'. A word that conveys this sense of young people who are just setting out on their adult journey being addressed by someone who cares about what they are doing. Rather like an older craftsman calling his young apprentice lad when he checks to see how he is going with an assigned project.

So Jesus adopts the role of an older and more experienced Master and in the Greek text He asks the question in such a way that they realize that He expects a negative answer. "Children, you have not caught any fish, have you?"

Now they may well have been surprised that this person had obviously guessed that they hadn't caught any fish, but the fact was that they hadn't, so their sharp response is "No we haven't".

And it is as though what Jesus says here to His followers about actual fishing is what He says to them and us about being fishers of men.

That He does not expect any of us to be successful for Him without His power, strength, and direction. We can have all the human skills and knowledge and programmes and resources possible, but without Jesus we will achieve nothing.

But with Jesus directing our actions. With Jesus as the central figure. With Jesus as the One whose Words we follow, then our effectiveness is incredible.

For a whole night those disciples had put all their many skills and resources to work and had caught nothing. Then one act of obedience to the voice of the Lord and they caught 153 large fish.

And afterwards as they talked amongst themselves and questioned what it was that made such a difference to their fishing, they would have answered, 'the presence of Jesus with us'. And much later when they started to live for Jesus and to proclaim the Gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit, they would have realized that their effectiveness was because Jesus was in their midst.

We will never be effective for Jesus if He is not the central figure in all we do. Whether we are talking about a ministry we do for him, a relationship we have turned over to him, a marriage we live out for Him, or a prayer we pray for Him, if our love for Jesus and our trust in Him does not compel us, then all we will do will achieve nothing.

But the opposite is also true. That Jesus delights to use children like us to bring other fish into His kingdom. He doesn't look for great people to do His work but for small people who accept their weaknesses yet are willing to go to Jesus regularly for the food He gives, and to ever listen to the voice that says, "Here's a good spot to fish. Throw your net in here for me".