

“Learning to Fly Fish”

John 21:1-11

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. 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.

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, ‘Children, you have no fish, have you?’ They answered him, ‘No.’ He 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. That 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 lake. But 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.

When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, ‘Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.’ So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn.

Part 1 “What a Catch”

Rev. Ray Miller

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One of my favorite movies, and maybe one of yours too, is *A River Runs Through It*. Have you seen it? Wow, what a great movie, great on many levels. I don’t know what it was that really grabbed me...It’s a story about this Presbyterian pastor and his sons and their relationship. Maybe that was it, because, as a father with a son, I could relate to the better things and the not-so-good things that were in that movie. Or maybe it was because of the setting. Maybe there, on that lake, with the mountains of Montana behind it, and out there just this pastor and his son or sons, fly fishing, it just brought peace to me, in the midst of hectic life, and I just wanted to drink it in. Well, then we move to Colorado, and I discovered that in Colorado, most people who go fishing out here don’t fish the way I had learned to fish.

I fished in lakes in Minnesota and in Canada, where you go out in a boat, you sit in a boat, you put your line in the water with either a lure or some live bait, worms or leeches or something, and you sit there with your fishing rod, hoping something will bite, and every once in a while you have to reel it in to see if you missed one because they’ve stolen your bait, then you put some more on and put it in. That’s the way I was used to fishing, and out here, most of the people, it seemed, go fly fishing, and I had no idea what fly-fishing was, except from the movie, *A River Runs Through It*. So I told my family, “I

want to learn how to fly fish,” so my son and his wife, three Christmases ago, bought me a fly fishing rod, reel, an empty box for flies, and I think they gave me a book on how to fly fish. Well, all of that stuff sat in the garage for three years, and about two and a half weeks ago, a friend of mine was having a one-day event called – get this – “Men, Zen and Fly Fishing.” He said, “You know, you don’t have to know how to fly fish, in fact you don’t even have to have any equipment, you just come.” So I signed up. I said, “I’m going fly fishing.”

And on that Friday morning, off I went to Sylvandale Ranch out there just west of Loveland, and part of the day was spent learning how to fly fish. How many of you fly fish? Good, there aren’t too many here who fly fish, so whatever I say, I won’t have many people telling me, “You don’t know what you’re talking about,” because I basically don’t. But anyway, I learned that when you put your fly fishing rod together, you moisten it. Did you all know that? I was taught that because it’s dry out here, and if you don’t, it’s going to be hard to get it apart. I learned, well I sort of knew how to run the line through the eyes, there, but how to put the reel on. I learned how to put a fly on, and I learned there are different kinds of flies. There are flies that float on top of the water, for fish that feed on top of the water, and there are flies that go, if they have a little weight on them, that go under the water, for fish that like to eat under the water. Neat. That way, you get them both. So I learned how to put the hooks on.

And then came the big thing- learning how to cast. Now, casting is the whole thing, and I remember in *A River Runs Through It*, thinking “I’m going to cast like that some day.” But you have to start with basics. We practiced and practiced and practiced and practiced casting, casting, casting. When we finally graduated from that school, we moved up to a pond and began trying our skills that we had just learned. I caught nothing. Sort of like I would do on the lakes in Minnesota, so I wasn’t surprised.

But you know, fishing is a big part of our faith story, isn’t it. Some of the disciples were fishermen, and there are so many stories in the Bible about fishing. I love the one that David read here this morning, you know, it’s the one about the disciples after Jesus’ resurrection, they didn’t know what to do with it, they didn’t know what they were supposed to do now, and so they went back to fishing. And there was this day when Peter says to them, “Hey, dude, do you want to go fishing?” “Sure, we have nothing else to do.” So they got in a boat, and out they went, and out there they were, fishing, all night long. And there’s this curious thing that is says in there. Peter was naked. I’ve tried to figure out why he was naked. I have the answer now, I didn’t have it at 8:00, but I have the answer now. He was naked because he figured that if he didn’t catch any fish, he could go skinny-dipping. Will that fly? Okay, I don’t know why.

But they went out there fishing, and they threw their nets on the right side, they threw them on the left side, they threw them over the front, they threw them over the back. And when morning came, *nada*. Nothing. And then here’s Jesus. They don’t know it’s Jesus, because it’s just barely dawn. They look across, and there’s a little bit of fog, and they see a figure over there, and this person calls out and says, “Got any fish?” “No.” “Oh, I’m hungry. Hey, how about casting your net on the right side?” “We’ve been fishing all

night long,... all right, why not? What do we have to lose?" So they put their net on the right side of the boat and *voila!* So many fish, they couldn't drag in into the boat. They dragged it over to shore, and I love the specificity of this story. When they counted the fish, how many were there? A hundred and fifty-three large fish. How many of you have ever caught a hundred and fifty-three large fish? Somebody told me after 8:00 that they had caught a hundred and fifty. They didn't say they were large, just a hundred and fifty fish.

Now, what does this have to do with anything? Well, here's the rest of the story. When they finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I do." He said to him again, "Feed my sheep." He said to him again, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" And Peter said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Tend my sheep" He said to him a third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt, because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?", and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. Very truly I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and go wherever you wished, but when you grow old you will stretch out your hand, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God. After that, he said to Peter, "Follow me."

John 21:15-21

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' A second time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' And he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.' (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, 'Follow me.'

Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; he was the one who had reclined next to Jesus at the supper and had said, 'Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?' When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, 'Lord, what about him?'

Part 2 "Go Where the Fish Are" **Rev. Ray Miller**

Several years ago I was attending an annual conference in Indiana, and the bishop there then was Bishop Woody White, a wonderful preacher, a wonderful person. The sermon that he preached at the ordination service was titled, "Tell the Story." He was challenging all of us, pastors and lay people alike, to tell the story. Tell the story of our faith, tell the

story of the difference that being followers of Jesus has made in our lives. We have a song in the church we sometimes sing, "I love to tell the story of Jesus and his love." Well, when was the last time you told the story to someone? I remember when I first moved here from Illinois. I was having some work done on my car. When I went to pay for it at the cashier's window, I must have shared with her that I was new in town and some other things, and she said, "Let me tell you about my church. I'm sure you're going to want to find a church. I really love going to my church, it's so exciting there, it's so full of love, it's so..... I mean every time I go there, I leave feeling happy about having been there with these people and worshipping God." She said, "Why don't you come and visit here some time?"

When was the last time you shared enthusiastically about your church? Our church? You see, our mission, as the church, our mission as followers of Jesus, our mission is to tell the story. Now, I'm not saying that you're supposed to go out and find somebody and say, "I want to tell you a story all about Jesus." But there are times in your life when you encounter people that are ready to hear something like, "Let me tell you how I made it through my divorce. Let me tell you about the people that supported me. Let me tell you about how it was for me when my spouse died, and the people that were there for me. Let me tell you what it was like when we didn't know whether we'd be able to keep our home or not, and there were people there for us. Let me tell you about how exciting it was, not just for us, but for the whole church family, when we had our child baptized. Let me tell you what it was like, let me tell you about my church, let me tell you the difference it has made in my life, being with people where we can enter into studies and can share something of ourselves and how we believe, and they share, and somehow out of that whole thing we discover that our faith is growing deeper and we're coming to greater understanding of what it's all about. Let me tell you about the things we do, reaching out to someone in need."

Bishop White says, "Tell the story. Tell the story." Well, we formed a new task force this year. It was initially called the Evangelism Task Force. Nobody likes the word "evangelism" any more. You know, my first experience of evangelism when I was in college, carrying mail during the Christmas time, was a woman who approached me and said, "Do you love Jesus? Are you saved?" I said, "I've saved a lot." I just wanted to get away from her. So we changed the name. They came up with this name, Open Doors Task Force. We got together and what we wanted to do was to try and figure out how to share with people in this area who we are, as First United Methodist Church in Fort Collins. We decided we needed to get the message first. We decided to put together, as best we could, a message that had no churchy language in it. Because, you know, you use churchy language and people who aren't churchy don't know what you're talking about. Or they think that you're just like all those churchy people that show up in the media, in the newspapers, in the streets, on television, the ones you hear about, the kinds of portrayals of Christian faith that I can't relate to, because I don't see Jesus in a lot of that. For many, what they hear and see and experience is a religion of rigidity, a religion of judgment, a religion of condemnation, a religion that divides. And somehow that isn't who I see Jesus being. I see our Christian faith as kind of like being a large circle that God has created, that includes everybody. The large circle being, maybe, the world, and

God says, “These are my people. These are the ones I have made. These are the ones whom I love.” And that’s what I see in Jesus, how about you?”

So how do we get that word out? Well, this task force came up with this – it’s in your bulletin, you might want to get it out. Look what it says. “Open hearts, open minds, open doors. What’s behind the open doors? We are a community of people with open hearts. Our hearts are open to the needs of others. Our goal is to make a difference in the world through love.”

Is that who we are? (This is supposed to be an interactive message.) I don’t know, is that who we are? Maybe that was your answer. Is it who we are? Open minds. We are a community of people with open minds. We come with our questions and viewpoints, open dialogue enlightens us. Is that who we are? We are a community of people with open doors. Everyone is welcome, we do not judge, only encourage one another. I think that’s who we are. I know that you are just as enthusiastic as I am about being part of this congregation, and I believe that God has led us to the point where we need to begin more and more to tell the story. This represents “talking points.” That’s what we say these days, and I encourage you to take it with you, and become familiar with it, because these are the things that our committee believes that people would respond to.

So. Tell the story. And it’s time to go fishing, so to speak. Be sure when you do so, you put on a hook that floats on the top of the water, and one that goes a little under the water. Because there are all kinds of people in our world that need to hear the story. So maybe our response is, “Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling, and Lord, I am ready to go.”