

Easter 3C, 2013

Text: John 21:1-19

Title: Jesus' Last Miracle

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Jesus' first miracle was in Cana of Galilee. He and His mom had been invited to a wedding, and you know how the story goes. They have no wine. Jesus' mom gives Him a nudge, but Jesus says, "Not yet." Then she tells the servants, "Do whatever He tells you."

He tells them to do something silly, something strange, serve the wine steward some water, but the servants do what Jesus tells them to do, and they have more wine than they know what to do with.

Jesus' last miracle is back in Galilee. They've returned back home from Jerusalem, and this is the last recorded miracle of Jesus before His ascension.

Again there is something missing. They have no fish. And again Jesus tells them to do something silly, something strange, throw your net on the other side of the boat, and when they listen to Jesus, they have more fish than they know what to do with.

Listen to Jesus. His words make all the difference.

Now the disciples were experienced fishermen. They did this for a living. This wasn't just a hobby. They knew what they were doing. Seven of them piled into the boat and headed off to fish that night.

Remember that fishing was an all-night affair. At night, the waters near the shore cooled, and the fish came near to feed.

They fished with nets, in this case a casting net, one that you threw into the water, and then sank to the bottom by virtue of lead weights tied to the ends. Then someone had to dive into the water and pull the net back into the boat, hopefully full of fish. That's why Peter wasn't wearing any clothes. He had spent the night in the water pulling in the net.

It was hard work.

It must have been frustrating for the disciples to work all night and catch nothing.

But then Jesus comes. And His words change everything. He tells them to do something silly. Try the other side of the boat. Peter and the others have probably been casting from both sides of the boat all night. If there were no fish in one place they'd move on to the next.

But this time they catch so many that the nets can't hold them all.

It's not like Jesus was some sort of fishing expert, or that He just made a lucky guess as to where the fish would be. No, it's His word that fills the nets full of fish. The disciples recognize that only Jesus could do such a miracle.

There have been times, too, that you've been frustrated. You've been working hard doing what you think is right and best, only to come up empty. You have no fish. You have no wine.

Perhaps you've worked hard all your life and have little to show for it- not much saved, no big house or fancy car, no season tickets or regular vacations. You feel like the disciples in the boat after a long night of fishing with nothing to show for it.

This can happen in the church, too. We work hard, we cast the net into the water again and again. We send out invitations and letters and phone calls. We talk to people and encourage them over and over again to come to church, to be part of our community, but the nets keep coming up empty. Nothing seems to work.

So what's the answer?

What was the answer that Jesus gave the disciples: Buy a bigger, fancier boat? Go get more training in how to fish? Design a net made with more high-tech material? Does Jesus tell His disciples to go buy a GPS for their boat or the newest fish-finder?

Of course not. Just try one more time, and listen to me, do it my way. I'm here with you now.

And when they did, when they listened to Jesus, that made all the difference. When they did things their way, they came up empty. When they listened to Jesus, their nets overflowed with fish.

Now that's not saying that there's one thing we can today and expect 153 new fish in the pews next Sunday. But our only hope as we move forward as a congregation is in listening to Jesus and following Him.

If we trust in ourselves and our ideas, we are certain to fail. Instead, we listen to Jesus and follow Him. What are these words? What guidance and direction does Jesus have for us? We need to read a little further in the story to find out.

After realizing that the man on the shore was Jesus, Peter jumped into the water and swam to shore. They all had breakfast together and then Jesus took Peter aside, and He gave Him some words to follow, that would guide the rest of His service.

Jesus said to Peter, feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep. These are Jesus' words to Peter going forward, and they are the words for us as well.

Life in the church is simple, when you get down to it. Jesus says, "feed my lambs." You are a lamb, you are a sheep in Jesus' care. You are Jesus' lamb. You're not my lamb, you're not my sheep, you're not my member, and you're not Faith's member. You belong to Jesus.

Jesus then calls pastors, that is shepherds, to feed you, to care for you. Not to entertain you, not to make you wealthy and prosperous, not to make you feel good about yourself, but to feed you, to care for you.

Jesus fed His disciples. There on the beach He fed them bread and fish. And it wasn't the first time. A few years earlier, he had provided bread and fish, not just for the disciples, but for over 5,000 others. And then Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."

This is what Jesus is talking about with Peter. Not feeding people with bread and fish, but feeding them with Himself, with His own body and blood. This is what Peter is sent out to do, and what all pastors after Him are sent to do: feed Jesus' own people with Himself, with His body and His blood.

It may sound silly, it may sound strange, to build a church around words and water, bread and wine. It would make more sense to build the church on stages and bands, slick technology and charismatic personalities.

But that's not Jesus' way. Jesus builds the church on Himself. Jesus' way is to use simple things like water, bread, and wine, and use them to give folks Himself, and all His blessings.

After Jesus' rose from the dead, He didn't organize a huge rally in Galilee, instead, He had a quiet breakfast on the lake. He didn't give Peter or John all sorts of strategy and techniques for guiding the church, but only the simple words, feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep.

That's what we do, too. We give Jesus to folks who keep coming up empty in life, who keep trying over and over again and only have empty nets.

When it comes to pleasing God, trying to live a good, holy life, we come up empty by ourselves. We can never come up with good works, good deeds that we can be proud of. On our own, our nets are empty.

But Jesus comes with His words of life and blessing. His words fill our lives overflowing with His gifts. More wine, more fish, more love and grace and forgiveness than we ever could have imagined, all for free, all without us doing anything for it.

And all through Jesus and His word, His words make all the difference.