

## Feed My Sheep

By: Keith Holste

April 10, 2016. Pastor Keith talks about John 21:1-19. Following his resurrection, Jesus appears to the disciples, who are fishing but not catching anything. He tells them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat, and then they catch fish in abundance. Peter, now recognizing Jesus, jumps into the water to get to him as quickly as possible. We too have the opportunity to jump in and follow Jesus. He calls us too with the water of baptism, and sends us, as he sent Peter, into the world to feed and tend his sheep.

\*\*\* Transcript \*\*\*

We begin in the name of the Father, and Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

There's almost a sense in the Gospel of John that you can say, "Here we go again." John does well at starting themes early on in the ministry of Jesus, and then picking them up late in the end — and taking them a step further. The scene of the disciples in the boat that night was not the first time that Jesus had been with them when they had been fishing. Very early on in his ministry, you'll remember that the disciples were fishing all night and caught nothing, and Jesus said cast your nets to the other side, and they did and they caught many fish. That was the time when Jesus was first calling the disciples, and it was the moment when Peter first heard the call that he should be a follower of Jesus. So now again, after the resurrection, eight of the disciples are fishing one night. Again they catch nothing. In the early morning they hear this man on the shore say, "Cast your net to the other side." So they do, and the net is full of fish — so much that they had trouble pulling it into the boat. This is the time when John recognizes Jesus. At first they don't quite catch what's going on, but then they realize this is Jesus who's over there on the shore. John says, "It is the Lord!" And Peter jumps in the water as soon as he can, and Jesus has a special conversation with Peter, in a sense re-commissions him as a missionary and caretaker of the church.

The little fire that Jesus has on the shoreline reminds us of a previous fire in the Book of John. It was on the night of the trial of Jesus that Peter was close by Jesus, but not feeling very confident as the leaders and the crowds were out to get Jesus. And in the glow of that little fire outside the hall where Jesus was on trial, the maids were there and the men were there who were kind of interested in this trial also. And they identify Peter and say hey, you're one of his disciples aren't you? And Peter denies it. And three times Peter says, "I don't know the man." So now on the lakeshore, where the disciples gather around Jesus, there is a fire. Jesus uses it to cook some fish that they caught. But also Jesus has a conversation with Peter. Three times he asks Peter, "Do you love me?" Three times Peter replies, "Yes Lord, you know that I love you." And Peter re-commits to the Lord. Peter re-commits to such a degree that he is a powerful spokesman for the church and a missionary for the Lord. And as this reading foreshadows, he will die because he is so committed to the Lord. He will be bound. His arms will be outstretched. And Peter dies on a cross himself for the sake of Jesus.

The third thing that takes us back to the beginning of John is that there is this abundance that we just talked about with the young people. John is a gospel that proclaims the abundant love and grace of God. And it's presented in the miracles of Jesus that he does in the Book of John. The first miracle we hear about in John, that we talked about earlier this year, was when he and his mother Mary were at a wedding and the hosts run out of wine. Jesus makes wine miraculously and in abundance, with huge jars being filled with wine. This is the first sign that John wants us to know: this man does things with abundance. So now at the end, Jesus is still making miracles in abundance. After catching no fish all night, at the command of Jesus to change the sides of the boat where they throw the net out, they catch

so many fish they have difficulty pulling the net back in then. It says it was a hundred and fifty-three we assume large fish. Again, Jesus points to this not as a small thing. They go from zero to so many they can barely pull all the fish into the boat.

Jesus says in John, "I came that they might have life and have it abundantly." Jesus shows us that God is not stingy with love. God loves in abundance. Jesus loves in abundance when he reclaims the disciple Peter and commissions him to, "Feed my sheep. Tend my sheep." Jesus also loves in abundance when, with this fire he started, he uses some of the fish that they have caught to cook fish for them and serve it with bread that he has. These are the same people who, on that night when Peter had denied the Lord three times, were also fleeing themselves and hiding and getting as far away from Jesus as they could, because they were fearful. They were hiding on the morning of Easter. A couple of them did go out to look at the tomb, but rushed back where they hid behind closed doors. They had sold Jesus short along the way, not trusting him on that previous occasion. But yet on another occasion when Jesus was going to feed a whole crowd of people and they questioned him then, they said how can you feed so many with so little? This little boy had his lunch with some fish and bread in it. There again was an abundance of fish and bread. The disciples had doubted that Jesus could feed with abundance. Now Jesus is abundant in his forgiveness of them. He cooks the meal for these men who had denied him that night and run away from him and fled and hidden as much as they could. He lets them know that they are back in the fold. Even though they had run away, he receives them back to himself and commissions them to be disciple missionaries to the world. His love, his forgiveness are abundant.

This abundant love, this true and abundant forgiveness we see demonstrated in this shore lunch, with the disciples and re-commissioning of Peter, is something that's really a game changer we could say — or better said, a life changer and a vision changer — for those who see the significance of what Jesus means for the world. The world tends towards zero sum thinking, saying there's only so much and we have to share or get by with what we can in the world. The world worries that there isn't enough and that God is out to judge them. And now Jesus comes with this new vision, proclaiming through John that through him we might have life and have it abundantly.

When the disciple John puts together that the man who was over there on the shore and said "cast your nets on the other side" is Jesus, he told Peter, "It's the Lord." And so they made haste to get to the shore to be with Jesus. He knew that this was a man who could make abundant fish appear. He was the one who had taught and lived by law. When they saw him it was a literal God sighting.

A few years ago, as part of the language we learned with the Missional Church project, one of the words we learned was "God sighting" — how to look for God sightings in the world around us. There's a way to see God at work in the world, how abundant life and love in Jesus can be lived out in different ways. We learned such things as dwelling in the word as a spiritual practice, to be better in tune with the word and with the world, that we might perceive God at work. We did interviews with people in the congregation, outside the congregation, in the community. We see where our acting out this love might be beneficial. We experimented to see how and where this might happen. And I was pleased a couple years ago when I was with the youth on the trip to Hastings, Michigan. The youth group YouthWorks Camps do work in the community, but by night they gather and worship in a youth-friendly kind of way. And some nights they give the kids the opportunity to share their God sightings from the day. And two of our kids that night — Tommy and Taimika — got up before four or five hundred kids and said what their God sightings were during the day. It shows how we can be trained to see how God is at work in the world. John and Peter saw and heard the Lord. We all want to be ready to see God at work and present in our world and in our lives.

I hear the experiences our members have as they enter into conversations with people they haven't met before, and discover a need and begin to talk with that person more deeply. The relationship develops and it creates a place for God to dwell. Some will enter into deeper conversations with people they've known previously, and good things develop from that. Opportunities become apparent, and the presence of God can be seen and known. A person is open to seeing God in that conversation or in that relationship. We may not see Jesus in the flesh, but we can see the love of Jesus and the presence of God in what transpires. We can see the presence of God in what we do each day.

When John told Peter that it was the Lord who was on the shore, Peter put on some clothes as quickly as he could. He leaves the others in the boat behind, and jumps in the water to get to Jesus. Peter knew, when he saw Jesus, that he needed to get to Jesus right away. Peter reminds us that when we see an opportunity to serve with Jesus, we need to jump in too. Our tendency can be to hang back. The tendency can be to strategize too long and think about doing something, and while we're thinking about doing something we lose the opportunity to do it. This doesn't mean we lose all sense about things and just go without thinking. Peter did think to put his clothes on before he went to the shore, so there was some thought before he jumped in. So we want to give some thought too. But it's a reminder that just as Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me?" and then told him to "Feed my sheep," Jesus forgives us, invites us to a meal with him and into a relationship with him, and expects us to love him and to feed his sheep. Jesus sends us out also with the command and with a promise. Sometimes we don't engage. This lesson is an encouragement for us to jump in where there is an opportunity to see Jesus in the action that we take.

Jesus began the ministry with the disciples, and after his death and resurrection he was with them again, and sent them out again before he ascended. Jesus has come and claimed us. He calls us, and with water — the water of baptism — he begins anew with us. He calls us. Just as he called them, he calls us, to come in out of the wet water — the wet water of baptism — and to receive others as he says to us as well, "Feed my sheep. Tend my Lambs." Jesus wants us to be feeders and tenders as well of the people who are around us. And as we come out of the waters of baptism, we are called also to feed and tend. We're called to see opportunities where God may be present, and to jump in and multiply the love of God that's there, so the abundant life of God may be seen and known.

We're sustained in that through the bread and through the wine in the meal that Jesus gives us. It may not be on the beach most of the time, but we have this meal with Jesus, with bread and wine. He's present with us. He receives us where we are, forgiven sinners as we are, just as the disciples were that morning. They were forgiven sinners. But he receives them back, and as he sent them out he sends us out from the meal of communion to feed and tend, just as he sent out the disciples. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

\*\*\* Keywords \*\*\*

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