

May 1, 2022  
Third Sunday of Easter  
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH  
Pastor Joel Sutton

John 21:1-14

## NATURAL EVANGELISM

Alleluia! Christ is risen!  
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

Our text for meditation today comes from the Gospel according to St John, the 21st chapter, which you heard read earlier.

If you haven't read my May Newsletter, I encourage you to pull it out of your email spam or trash folder and look it over. While the Newsletter describes how our Church Council budgets our Missions dollars here at St Timothy, it also describes the mission of Christ's Church and how you, everyday Jane and Joe Christian, also carry out the mission of the Church in your ordinary and everyday lives.

What is the mission of the Church? Making disciples! Making new Christians! In the last chapter of Matthew, Jesus says to His Church:

***“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”*** (Matthew 28:19–20)

The words “***go therefore***” ***are not*** imperatives so that you sell everything and head straight out to the mission fields. No. The original language gives the sense that “***as you go om your way***” make disciples. While you are going about your ordinary lives awaiting our Lord's return, the mission of the Church and ordinary Christians is making new Christians. The Church does this by means of preaching and teaching Jesus' Word, and administering the Sacraments. And you carry out the mission of the Church in your ordinary lives by doing what comes naturally. Our Gospel text illustrates this for us this morning.

Last week's Gospel text seemed like a perfect way for St John to conclude His eyewitness account of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. On the evening of the day of Jesus' resurrection, He appeared to all His disciples, except for Thomas, and gave them His ***peace***. (cf: John 20:19–23) When Jesus says ***peace***, He gives exactly what the word says. It is ***objective peace***. In Jesus' work of salvation He made ***peace*** between God and man. ***Peace*** between God and you. On that night Jesus gave His disciples the ***peace*** of forgiveness of all sins, the faith to believe it, and the authority to forgive sins. They have now seen the risen Christ and believe. Eight days later,

Thomas also sees Jesus and the wounds in His hands and side – and he, too, now believes. (cf: John 20:26-28) Jesus says to Thomas:

***“Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*** (John 20:29)

Seeing is believing, but blessed are you and all who see the resurrected and living Christ with eyes of faith. Blessed are you that Holy Scripture was breathed out by the Holy Spirit and recorded for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. (cf: 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21) That is why it seemed that St John had concluded His Gospel account perfectly in last week’s text when he wrote:

***“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; <sup>31</sup> but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”*** (John 20:30-31)

But there is more to the story. What about Jesus’ disciples? What are they to do? They know that Jesus would go before them to Galilee, but they didn’t know when. (cf: Matthew 26:32, 28:7; Mark 16:7) So St John continues his narrative, so we know that the disciples simply did what comes naturally.

Peter is a fisherman and fishermen go fishing. It is what a fisherman does. And not having received any further instructions from Jesus, Peter and six other disciples go fishing. They fish all night long and catch nothing. (cf: John 21:3) But unbeknownst to these fishermen, they were precisely *where* and *were doing* exactly as Jesus wanted. While they are out fishing, Jesus goes before them to Galilee. St John writes:

***“Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup> Jesus said to them, “Children, do you have any fish?” They answered him, “No.” <sup>6</sup> He said to them, “Cast the net on 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 of the quantity of fish.”*** (John 21:4–6)

If this sounds familiar, it is because it happened once before. (cf: Luke 5:1–11) It was early in Jesus earthly ministry when the disciples had fished all night and caught nothing. So Jesus said to Peter:

***“Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.”*** (Luke 5:4)

At Jesus’ Word they let down their nets and hauled in a catch so large that their nets were breaking and after dividing the fish into two boats, the boats begin to sink. (cf: Luke 5:6-7) Luke records:

***“... when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.’”*** (Luke 5:8)

It is the natural reaction of a sinful man standing before our holy God. It is the natural reaction of a man who had not yet seen the cross. Without the forgiveness of the cross, Peter, you, me, and all mankind could never be in God’s presence. In fact, we wouldn’t want to be because by

nature, we're enemies of God. (cf: Romans 8:7) But this time it is different. This time when they cannot haul in the huge catch, our text says:

***That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea.***” (John 21:6-7)

Peter swims for shore to meet Jesus. He can't wait to be near Jesus. It is the natural reaction of all who believe in the cross and resurrection. Believing in the crucified and risen Christ creates a completely new nature. It is the nature of the new man, the one who knows he's forgiven and loved by God. It is the nature of the one who knows he is going to be with God forever in eternity – and can't wait to get started.

Perhaps this is why the Holy Spirit inspired John to record this particular miracle. It's not just another resurrection appearance of Jesus. It's an intentional reminder to the new man of what naturally follows after you have seen the risen Christ with eyes of faith, believe in Him, and have received God's objective *peace*. And notice how St John illustrates it. Similar to our Lord's words to make disciples of all nations while you go about your ordinary lives, St John does not give an imperative command saying: “Go! You must go do this.” He gives you a subtle, yet obvious nudge, wrapped in the story of a fishing trip.

John knows that all believers are fishers of men. It is natural. God planted faith within you and faith cannot be shut in. You know the tomb is empty. You have our Lord's promise of forgiveness of sins, life, and eternal salvation – and it is natural to want everybody else in the world to have the same thing. Fruits of faith always flow forth from the love of the One who first loved you. As a believer, your new self is ready to serve everybody wherever you can. (cf: Law and Gospel, Walther, 293) As a new creation in Christ, living by faith in the Son of God who first loved you, you cannot help but to share the good news of salvation in Christ, His love, and His spiritual blessings with friends and neighbors. When you do nothing, and to be sure, you and I often do nothing, we are listening to the old sinful nature that remains inside us. But the new man and woman can't wait to share. Fishermen fish. Christians want to make new Christians.

Now, of course, you and I ordinary Christians don't sit down and decide precisely how many new Christians we want to make or when and where we will do it. God alone creates faith. The Holy Spirit moves whenever and wherever He wills. (cf: John 3:8) The best-laid plans of men are meaningless. Peter says: “*I'm going fishing,*” but they labor all night and catch nothing. Without Christ Jesus, all your fishing for men is just as fruitless.

Just as the disciple did not know that they were precisely *where* and *were doing* exactly as Jesus wanted, neither do you and me. Jesus does all the work while you and I ordinary Christians, carry out our Lord's mission in our ordinary everyday lives by doing what comes naturally.

It was by the will of Jesus that the disciples were in the boat and at that place on the sea. It was He who told them where to throw their net. He's the one who prepares and feeds them breakfast just as He did in the feeding of the five thousand. (cf: John 21:12-13, 6:1-14) Jesus always feeds and equips the believer so that fruit of faith might flow forth from the love of the One who first loved you, wherever He puts you.

Just as Jesus used these ordinary fishermen to catch a great catch of 153 fish, He uses ordinary believers like you and be to be fishers of men and women. Ever since John recorded his Gospel there has been much speculation of the significance of the exact number of the 153 fish. But perhaps the symbolism is not the number of fish itself, but that John records that in this instance:

***“... although there were so many, the net was not torn...”*** (John 21:11)

... unlike the great catch earlier in Jesus’ ministry. This might point to the power of the Gospel to save. (cf: Romans 1:16) The gates of hell cannot prevail. (cf: Matthew 16:18) The holy Ark of Christ’s Church will never sink. It stresses the importance that you and I ordinary believers should cast out the Gospel net to every tribe and nation as we naturally go about our ordinary lives so that the Holy Spirit can make new Christians.

New Christians aren’t made by beating people over the head with the Bible, by church-growth programs, or smooth-talking bait-and-switch schemes. New Christians are made by the Holy Spirit working through ordinary people like you as His fishers of men and women, in your everyday lives naturally seizing the opportunities that God presents before you in the midst of the routines of life.

That’s how it is with Jesus. He comes to you in the middle of the ordinary and routine needs of your life: in your vocation, family, illness, personal struggle, or failure. He promises to never leave you or forsake you. (cf: Deuteronomy 31:6; Matthew 28:20) He never leaves you alone. No circumstance is too severe or too mundane or routine for him.

And this is exactly what you share with your neighbor who shares with you their same severe or mundane circumstances. You are the messenger. The Holy Spirit is the One who creates faith. So you tell them about your stronghold, the God and rock of your salvation. (cf: Psalm 95:1) Tell them of the redeeming love of Jesus who loves all mankind to the point of death, even death upon a cross, making peace between God the Father and them. (cf: Philippians 2:8) And then, invite them to this place where miracles greater than 153 fish in a net happen every Sunday as our Lord comes into our presence with His unlimited grace and forgiveness of sins. When the Holy Spirit moves, we will be here to support them and to catechize and baptize them so they may receive our Lord’s precious gifts in Word and Sacrament. And that dear friends is how Christians are made.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!  
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,  
Amen.