



John 21:1-14  
 Personal Jesus  
 Gone Fishing

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When I was a kid, I grew up swimming at a local community pool called “Norwood Pool.” It sits right near the top of Woodridge Hill where I grew up, in Bellevue. Every summer day, at noon, the pool would be open. There was a diving board and it was fun to do flips and back-flips and all kinds of things pools won’t let you do anymore because of insurance liabilities. We’d also play different pool games such as “sharks and minnows,” “tag,” and every lifeguard’s nightmare water game: Marco Polo, with it’s incessant repetitive call and response of “Marco!”...“Polo!”

And the whole time, the lifeguards would sit there in their lifeguard chair, scanning back and forth, eyes hidden behind sunglasses, keeping watch over all the people. And what’s a life guard’s number one job?.....To keep people safe. **So the thing that lifeguards mostly do is enforce the rules that are put in place to keep swimmers safe.** And so they sit there in their chair hollering out: “Shower off before entering the pool!” (Which isn’t a pool safety rule but a pool filter cleanliness rule.) “No running on the pool deck!” “No diving in the shallow end!” “One person on the diving board at a time!” “No handsprings off the diving board!” “No hanging on thd eiving board!” “The pool is not a toilet!” “Thunderstorm - pool is closed!” And every lifeguard’s favorite rule to enforce (and you’re putting your life at risk if you break this one): “Don’t splash the lifeguard.” You splash the life guard and your life could be in jeopardy, right? No lifeguard actually wants to get wet, which is pretty ironic since they’re working at a pool. And I know all this, because I worked as a lifeguard at that pool for three summers starting the summer after my sophomore year in High School.

But it occurs to me that this is how we often view God. (Which, when you’re the lifeguard, is kind of cool, I suppose.) **Just as kids in a pool view the lifeguard like this, we often think God is up above us in some great tower in the sky, watching over His creation, hollering out when we break the rules.** We think of God hollering at us through preachers (!) or our parents or our spouse or our conscience or the Bible, or some other way...whenever we break a rule. It’s a belief in a God who isn’t very personal. In this view, He’s just a rules-enforcer sitting high up in his chair, eyes hidden behind the

sunglasses.

And yet, Jesus, who is God come to us in the flesh, gives us a completely different picture. And we're seeing this throughout our series this summer: that Jesus is much more personal with people. He knows them. He cares for them. He wants what's best for them – at a much deeper level than just enforcing some rules – though there certainly are some boundaries/rules in life that God has set up that make for a better experience while we walk the face of the earth.

So it's not that He wants us to break rules...but the point is: He's with us. He's come to us. He relates to us. He engages with us. **In a nutshell: He's personally involved with us.** And we see that this morning. Now, this passage is post-resurrection, and I think Jesus showed himself here to demonstrate to them that he really was alive. Not a ghost. Not an image projected from R2D2. Not a group hallucination. He really was alive. It's the third time he's appeared to the disciples after his resurrection here in John. And they're all to demonstrate that He's really alive. But Jesus also demonstrates His personal, relational nature here.

So it begins with a handful of disciples following Peter's lead to go out fishing on the Sea of Galilee (some translations may have Sea of Tiberias – that's the Greek name). This is what these guys did, and where they did it, before they took a three-year hiatus to physically follow Jesus. So, were they returning to their old ways, reviving a past and thinking it would once again be their future? That's always a temptation, isn't it?

In fact, the language John uses here could indicate that. He says that they got in "the" boat. It's a specific boat. Not "a" boat, as though it was just any old boat that was there. This was "the" boat. Which boat would that likely be? Probably the boat that one of them had been using for fishing when they met Jesus, and maybe the one that had been used in their ministry with Jesus, as the crossed the lake some. Remember the movie, "**The Blues Brothers**"? It wasn't just any band getting put back together...it was *the* band. The old band. The one that they knew and loved. All that needed to be said was, "We're getting the band back together" and the guys knew



exactly what that meant. So it appears that the Disciples have gone back to their old ways, including back to the very boat that was being used previously.

But this doesn't really seem to be super-intentional. The picture John paints for us is one of a group of guys who are just kind of hanging out, with no particular sense of purpose or mission in life, and Peter decides he's got to go do *something*, and so he decides to go out fishing on the old boat. And I think at this point there's a couple ways to look at this. **First, it could be that they're returning to a past that God would like them to leave in the past.** This may have been a moment where Peter thought, "Well, following Jesus for the last few years was great, but now what? Guess I'll return to fishing since the boat is right in front of me, anyway." And the problem is that when we're holding on tightly to the past, it's hard to embrace the future. This is something that pretty much all people struggle with. **What from your past is trying to re-capture your attention and pull you away from the direction in which God is leading you?** Reconnecting with someone you once dated even though you're married now? A habit or addiction that you've overcome but is now tempting you to come back? A group of people you used to hang out with but weren't a good influence, and they still might hold sway over you if you got back into that group? And it's not that we have to forget the past...as if we even could...but we don't have to embrace it or let it embrace us, when *God* is seeking to embrace us and call us into something different. So *maybe* that's what's going on here. Maybe there's a temptation to return to something that's just going to distract and derail them from what Jesus sought to lead them into as His Disciples.

**On the other hand: this could be them just hanging out, doing something enjoyable, while figuring out what the next steps are.** The fact that they seem to just stumble into going back out on the boat points in this direction. This does not seem to be a group of guys who are intentionally jumping back into the fishing business, but rather, just doing something they enjoy together, while they figure out their next steps; Maybe it even gives them a little comfort in light of Jesus not being with them. And even though they fish all night and don't catch anything, undoubtedly it preoccupied their minds, gave them something to talk about, even as they certainly continued to talk about their time with Jesus and what the future held and what they should be doing

in light of the three years they spent following Him.

It's also possible that they were driven by short-term economic need, and they hoped to catch some fish and generate some income for the immediate future, and not return to it long-term...but again, the picture isn't really painted of people who are really motivated to go fishing with any great intentionality. **In all likelihood, they were just trying to figure things out with Jesus now gone, and fishing was like comfort food that would help them process their next steps.** A lot of people do something to help think about and pray about life. Some people knit, or sew, go for a run or a walk or a bike ride, do wood working, or go fishing as these guys did. A lot of men like to watch football. Ladies: there's some deep thinking going on at those times! ☺ It's no different than you getting some good life processing done when you go shopping...so let's just call it equal, ok? ☺

So early in the morning, when they're about 100 yards (200 cubits) off shore, and things are still grey in the early morning light, Jesus encourages them to throw their nets on the other side of the boat. He's like the ultimate fishing guide here, and they bring in a haul of over 150 fish. It's then that one of the disciples realizes from that distance and in the now brightening morning light, who it is that is standing on shore and told them to throw their nets on the other side of the boat: It's the Lord. It's Jesus.

And what's interesting about this is that they did not realize it was Jesus until after the haul of fish had come in. So: **They were obedient to what he said, but they didn't actually know it was Him.** A lot of what you'll read in books and online on this passage will praise the disciples about their obedience to Jesus here. But the thing is, it could've been anyone. They didn't recognize that it was Him. And I think sometimes this is so true for us, as well. We step out and try something, and it's not until afterwards that we can say, "You know, I think Jesus was calling me to go do that, even though I didn't realize it at the time. I'm sure glad I was obedient to Him even when I didn't recognize Him."

I've told you before about how after college I moved to Sun Valley. But that wasn't where my friend and I wanted to go. We wanted to go somewhere in Colorado. But Sun Valley is where we cast our nets, or set our skis, you

might say. And while at the time I would never have said to you, “I think Jesus is telling me to set my skis down in Sun Valley,” I could afterwards say quite clearly that going there was a part of God’s plan. So I was obedient to Him without even realizing I was being obedient to Him. And I can see that in hindsight because of meeting Gwen who in a moment of weakness said, “I do;” and I met Pastors Pete DeBaun and Al Oliver, who shepherded my faith and steered me toward the ministry. All I know is, if I ever get the opportunity to go to Hawaii or the Caribbean, believe me: I’ll go, and then look to see if it’s Jesus who sent me. ☺ So they’re obedient, but they don’t recognize it’s him until after it’s obvious.

So then **Peter puts on the piece of clothing he’d taken off for the fishing work, so as to now be properly clothed for Jesus.** And we shouldn’t take this to mean that they fished naked, as sometimes it’s presumed. That’s just weird. No one fishes naked now, and no one did then, either. This is more like guys working hard mowing the lawn or building a house, and taking their shirts off to keep a bit cool, and then putting it back on before greeting someone. If I’m sitting around my un-air-conditioned house in a pair of shorts and no shirt next Saturday afternoon thinking deep thoughts about my future while watching the Huskies football game...and the doorbell rings, I’m putting a shirt on before I go to the door. Unless it’s Gwen coming home from her deep thinking at Nordstrom, in which case I’ll leave the shirt off and flex my muscles real big as I answer. But generally speaking, a proper greeting includes being properly clothed. It was the same in their culture. That’s what Peter does here, even though it’s pretty funny that he then jumped into the water to get to shore. But that’s Peter for you, right? He’s a total “Ready, Fire, Aim” kind of guy.

But Jesus loves him anyway. **In fact, in spite of Peter’s propensity to act first and think second, he’s the one that Jesus picks to lead them going forward.** Peter doesn’t *replace* Jesus. This isn’t a passing of the torch to another Messiah. Only Jesus is the Messiah. But Peter becomes the leader as they collectively seek to share the Good News of Jesus. Earlier he’s the one to whom Jesus says, “On this rock” – speaking to/of Peter – “I will build my church.” Peter is the one we see preaching so persuasively early on in Acts. You see, just as Peter jumps in to get to Jesus as quickly as possible, Jesus wants us to come to him full throttle. We can wade into the water nice and

easy...maybe get our knees wet...or stay out of it, safely in the boat or like the lifeguard on the pool deck who doesn't want to get wet (though Jesus certainly welcomes those folks too...all the guys were invited to the breakfast)...or we can be like Peter and dive into the deep end to be with Jesus. And I know with Peter it's kind of a personality thing...that's just the kind of guy he was...but our journey of faith with Jesus isn't confined by our personalities. Even for shy people who would never put their foot in their mouths the way Peter does, who wouldn't be comfortable in that kind of up front leadership position, can dive into a deep place of faith with Jesus, and have deep influence and impact on the community of faith and the world around us for the cause of Christ.

And then here's the really cool part. This is the part I love the most about this event here, and what I think is most telling about the personal relationship Jesus has with these guys and wants to have with you and me. They've had all this relational, hanging out, fishing time together. We might do something similar in our lives. And Jesus joins with them for breakfast on the beach. In fact, he's the one initiating it. You see: **Jesus is not the lifeguard sitting up high watching for mistakes, and yelling out corrections; Jesus has a loving, caring, personal relationship with these guys, and encourages them to do the same with him, and with each other.** And actually, Jesus has apparently been doing some fishing of his own, and has some already getting cooked around the fire. And this is why I don't think that their going out fishing was a temptation from their past trying to drag them away from the future God was leading them into. I think they're just hanging out as guys, having fellowship and relationship time together, figuring life out together as they go fishing. And Jesus is totally cool with that...he blesses it and makes it a fruitful time: Without him, they would have gotten skunked! So He helps them catch their fish; he's even got a couple fish of his own; He's got the fire going to cook the fish; And he invites them to join him for breakfast on the beach. All that's missing is a singer with a guitar to lead them in "Kumbayah."

Jesus is still this way. He's the same yesterday, today, and forever. And Jesus loves it when His followers get together to just hang out and have fun together fishing or at a BBQ or sitting around a campfire, or watching a game or shopping together, and so forth. And it's oftentimes in those kinds of

situations where we are relaxed and open to sharing our struggles, or the choices we're facing, and therefore be encouraged in what we're going through, and ultimately help us to grow in faith. Jesus is with us in those places and during those times. **Even these kinds of things can be spiritual experiences, when we open our eyes up and recognize that Jesus is with us.** That's the key: recognizing and acknowledging Jesus' presence with us.

Every Monday evening a group of guys get together here at the church to play basketball. And the basketball is fun even if not award-winning, and the exercise is good. But it's the conversations between games, and the prayer time that we begin with every night, taking prayer requests...the checking in with one another on how things have been going lately...there are guys there who are not a part of any church, and that's the only place (as far as I know) where they can be prayed for like this. These are the deeper things that come out all because we get together to play some basketball. I'm sure the same thing has happened this weekend with the families that went camping up on Lopez Island. The Dinners for 8 groups that happen a couple times a year here at the church give the same opportunity (another coming this fall). The ladies who get together every Monday to make quilts that go to burn victims and premie babies...and there are so many other ways that God's people here at RH get together for some relaxing activity. And it's not just within formal ministry structures, but in anything that we all might do on our own, too.

And in the midst of that, relationships with one another will grow deeper, and so will our relationship with Jesus. I hope you know Jesus in this way in your life, as well. That he's not just something for Sunday mornings, and maybe a morning devotional or evening prayer time. I pray we'd know him in all facets of our lives, and might be looking for how he's deepening your faith and deepening your relationships with others in through these kinds of things. Because he's not an impersonal lifeguard yelling to us about all the rules. He's with us wherever we are, feeding us, warming us up with the fires of his Love, and demonstrating over and over again that He's alive and He wants a personal relationship with each of us. Let's pray...Amen.