



John 21:1-14
 So That You May Believe: John
 “Ministry on the Beach”

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Would it be ok if I start today’s message with a question? 😊 If not, well, it’s too late. Here’s the question I want to ask: **If you could be anywhere or do anything, and have some kind of Jesus-centered ministry wrapped around that place or the thing you’d do, where would you be, or what would you do?** For instance, I look at the organization called Youth With A Mission. Paul Hudson was a missionary with them for many years. Their headquarters are in Hawaii. And I’m like, “I want to do ministry *there*.” I don’t care what I do there – surfing ministry, research on volcanoes...whatever. Ministry for Jesus in Hawaii just sounds awesome.

Another I’ve thought of is to be an evangelist or a chaplain on the ski slopes of a big resort. It could be any of a number of places – Vail, Aspen, Jackson Hole, Sun Valley, Lake Tahoe, Whistler...and a whole bunch of others. The specific location isn’t so crucial. What matters is that it’s skiing paired with Jesus. It’s like an like ice cold milk and an Oreo cookie. In my mind, they “forever go together, what a classic combination,” because I’m passionate about both.¹

So, what would it be for you? If you’re not a Jesus follower, then answer the question without considering the ministry aspect of this. Take a moment, and: **Share with your neighbor where it is you’d be passionate to live and do ministry, or what it is you’re passionate about, that you would turn into a ministry somehow.** We’ll have a small countdown timer in the lower left corner of the screen; I’ll give you a minute or so to talk with your neighbor. Ready, set, go. 😊

So, I think engaging in this little exercise gets us thinking outside our usual boxes, perhaps, of what ministry looks like. We often think of ministry as Bible study, in a church building, maybe in someone’s home, prayer around a table, or singing worship songs in church, and so forth. But ministry is possible in a lot of settings, including in the places in life we already love to be in and things we love to do.

We see this in today's passage, as we continue in our series in the gospel According to John. This is our next to last sermon in this series. We will finish it next Sunday, have youth Sunday the following week (one service at 10:00), and start a new series on Memorial Day weekend when it's gonna rain and so plan on being here in church. But today we're in John 21:1-14. This is God's word to you and me this morning...

Ok, so while the events here all happen more or less in one "place", there are two scenes. The first is in the boat. There are 7 of the 11 disciples here, and they decide to all go out fishing, because Peter says he's going. John tells us that they caught nothing. A guy in my last church used to take people fishing occasionally, and he'd tell them, "I can take you fishing, but no promises I take you catching." ☺ They are two different things.

Initially, the disciples go *fishing*, but they clearly did not go *catching*. By the way, fishing at night was typical for them because the nets in their day weren't made of thin, almost invisible nylon fish string like we might be used to with fishing rods. Their nets were made of thicker material that could be seen by the fish during the day time and they'd go around the nets.

Now, typically, if fishing with just one boat, like here, they would let the net out behind or off the side of the boat with cork floats on the top edge and some weights on the bottom edge, and the fish would swim into the net. The net might be about 30 feet long, and oftentimes the boat would circle back around to bring the net into a loop to trap the fish in it.

So, this kind of fishing is a little more involved than trolling with a rod and reel like I did as a kid, where you let your line out and sit on your seat in a slow-moving boat waiting for a fish to bite. Plus, besides a couple guys working the net, they'd have at least a couple more rowing the boat, and another one steering a rudder. So, there's some activity involved in this. But, nonetheless: **They've got time to talk – they're out there for several hours in the middle of the night.** Maybe essentially "All night long" as they fish to a Lionel Ritchie tune ☺. And with the events that have recently happened – The Passover meal, foot-washing, the new commandment, Judas' betrayal, Jesus' sham trial, his death, the empty tomb, his couple of appearances to the

disciples that John has recorded already – there’s *plenty* to talk about. I just about guarantee you they talked about these things, and what should be next. They aren’t out there because they’re looking to return to the fishing lifestyle that they had before; they’re doing it to get some time together and talk.

In fact, you’ll recall that some of them were fishing when Jesus invited them to follow him. Mark and Matthew both record the first four guys invited by Jesus to be his disciples as fishermen. Famously, we read this account:

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” At once they left their nets and followed him” (Mark 1:16-18). So, Jesus’ invitation was to train them to fish – but for people, to be his disciples, and not for fish.

So, I don’t think they were actually considering going back to fishing, and it’s not what we see happening in Acts when the disciples start carrying the message of Jesus out into the world. But they are out here on the boat, in a place of comfort for them...it’s their happy place. And they’re probably pondering life, Jesus, and the next steps in light of all that has happened.

And that pondering/discussing is ministry right there. **Those conversations are ministry conversations. They are disciple-making conversations.** “What does Jesus’ death mean? What does his resurrection mean? What do we do now in light of this? He trained us to fish for people...are we really gonna return to the boats and the nets? What would Jesus want us to do now?” Those are undoubtedly the kinds of conversations they had as they let the net out, brought it in, let it out again, brought it in, and so forth. I can even imagine that one thing they might have said would be, “God, give us a sign of what we should do now – return to fishing for fish or go fishing for people.” Have you ever asked God for a sign like that? We probably all have. And don’t you think the lack of a *single* fish all night long would be an indicator that *maybe* fishing for fish *isn’t* what God wants them to be doing? What clearer sign could they have?

Then, early in the morning, apparently even before they're able to see who's on shore, someone calls out to them, "Friends, do you have any fish?" Now: **It's Jesus, but they don't realize it.** So, they respond, "No." I can just imagine they say this rather meekly, embarrassed at getting skunked. At least four of them are professional fishermen! So, the suggestion comes to them to throw their net on the other side of the boat. They give it a shot, and sure enough, there are so many fish they can't even get the net into the boat.

At that point, they realize who it is that's on shore – it's Jesus. *Now* the full net of fish, thanks to Jesus, is a sign from God about what they're supposed to be doing – and you gotta think, it isn't fishing for fish. Peter is so stoked to see Jesus that he does his Peter thing and acts before he thinks, (Ready, Fire, Aim!) jumping into the water fully clothed and swimming to shore like a drowning rat (at least, that's how I imagine him swimming). The rest follow in the boat, and once they all get to shore, they bring the net in. There are 153 fish in it – an unusually large haul of fish.

This brings them to the second scene in the narrative, with the boat being the first scene and the swimming and rowing back to shore being more of a transitional phase. **The second scene is here on the beach, where Jesus has a fire going, some fish cooking over it, and invites them to join him.** There's coffee with flavored creamers to make it taste good; bacon² and eggs...I mean, breakfast is served. And Jesus has even brought his guitar to lead them in singing Kum-by-yah and Little Bunny Foo-foo.

Now, John doesn't tell us about any of their conversation as they ate. We do get some conversation in next week's passage, so we know about that one. But undoubtedly they didn't just sit in silence the whole time. I mean, I know we're talking about a group of guys, and it *is* possible for a group of guys to sit in silence for a while...but not **THAT** long.

So, essentially, this is like a ministry leaders' breakfast, with the resurrected Jesus as the keynote speaker. **There is ministry happening here on the beach, around a campfire, on the shores of lake Galilee.** It's not in a building, it's not a structured setting, it wasn't even planned out in advance. There's nothing wrong with buildings, structure, and planning, of course. We

need that in our churches. A little structure and order often helps get us pointed in the right direction in how to serve. We need people to step into all kinds of organized ministry roles right now from Greeter on Sunday to teachers, to church meal coordinator and more. We have a whole list in the lobby and on our website and so if you need a little direction in where to serve. Take a look at that, then talk with me, or talk to another staff person.

But in the unorthodox, outside-the-box ministry opportunities, like here on the beach: Jesus is also still present. Sometimes we Presbyterians need especially to be reminded of this because we love to do things “decently and in order” as the apostle Paul writes (1 Corinthians 14). But Jesus is present in the unplanned and the unorthodox ministry opportunities as well. In fact, he’s initiated this one. Jesus loves it when His followers get together to just hang out and do life together: fishing, BBQ’ing, sitting around a campfire, or watching a game or having a cup of coffee together, going for a walk or a bike ride, and so forth. I know of a church in the Portland area that has a waterski boat that they use for ministry purposes. I am completely jealous! Any endeavor that we enjoy doing – from making quilts to skiing to dancing to reading books...the list goes on and on – **Any activity where we are with other people becomes an opportunity for ministry to happen.** We just need to approach them with a ministry mindset; go into them expecting opportunities for ministry.

You know: It’s oftentimes in those kinds of situations where people are relaxed and open to sharing their struggles, or the choices they’re facing, or the grief they’re bearing...and gives us the opportunity to minister to whoever it is we’re with. Could be someone in the pew next to you this morning, or someone from some other sphere of life. Jesus is with us in those places and during those times, and seeking to work through us in the midst of them. **The key is for us to be looking for Jesus’ presence and listening to his voice.** To be sensitive to his leading, to what he’s saying, to His Spirit leading us. Or maybe you’re the one who’s hurting, who’s confused, who has lost momentum and purpose in life and you just need someone to talk to. We’re here for you, because Jesus is here for you, and he is present with you.

So: Whatever you said at the start to your neighbor about where you'd like to be or what you'd like to do, and make it a ministry to Jesus: What's stopping you? I'm convicted by my own sermon today, and I'm buying a one-way ticket for Hawaii when I get home! Ok...maybe not. But right here (Kirkland, Redmond, Woodinville, Renton, Bellevue, Bothell...) wherever you live, wherever you work, wherever you play...God has given you some kind of passion, an interest, a hobby...something – maybe a few somethings even – that you can use to foster relationships with people, to create space for conversation and connection – like the disciples on the boat and gathered around the campfire. That is ministry. And in those spaces in life, Jesus will meet you, direct you, and lead you into ministry for the glory of his name. Let's Pray...Amen.

¹ So, just to make sure there's no misunderstanding or attempts to "read between the lines" in anything I'm saying here: I *love* being pastor at Rose Hill and living here in Kirkland. In fact, when people visit from out of the area, I tell them that Kirkland is like a southern California beach town – which *is* Hawaii-ish, right? – with its downtown right on the water...but with freshwater and waterski boats instead of saltwater and surfboards, and grey skies instead of blue.

² Ok, probably not bacon, given the Jewish food purity laws. If this had been a few months or so later, however, bacon could have been on the menu, thanks to the vision Peter has (Acts 10) about all food being declared "clean" (ok to eat).