

# Friends of the Center

## A Fishing Trip, Interrupted

*“I am going fishing.” – Simon Peter (John 21:3; NRSV)*

This is one of my favorite lines in the entire New Testament. After witnessing the ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus, after seeing miraculous healings and challenges to religious and political authorities, after watching his friend and rabbi alive after being dead 3 days, Simon Peter, overwhelmed and exhausted, turns to his buddies and says, “Enough”; he needs a break. He needs a few moments to himself, back in the life on the sea he knew before. And who can blame him?

But, of course, the gospel of John doesn’t end with Simon Peter returning to his old life. Who immediately meets him on the shores during his first post-resurrection fishing trip? The crucified and resurrected Jesus himself. Simon Peter’s quiet fishing trip is interrupted by the resurrected Jesus, who is not there to ask how the fish are biting, but who pointedly challenges him three times: “Feed my lambs” (21:15); “Tend my sheep” (21:16); “Feed my sheep” (21:17). There is no escape from what just happened to and around Simon Peter; the world has changed and no fishing trip will ever be the same.

The narratives of the New Testament do not show us what the crucifixion and resurrection were; rather they show us what the crucifixion and resurrection do. The claim of crucifixion and resurrection is not a mere statement of the existence of a historical event that we are called to recognize occurred in Judea millennia ago. After reading the New Testament, we are not invited to step away and think about how we might live because something incredible happened in the past. Instead, the New Testament’s central claim is that the world fundamentally changed when that tomb was emptied. The invitation is not to reflect, but to act. Whether using the language of the Gospel of John and the “paraclete” or Paul and the “holy spirit,” the text points to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as an ever-present reality in our world. This is the realization that Simon Peter comes to as he tries to resume life as it was. There is no stretch of water he can fish where the crucified and resurrected Jesus will not be there, challenging him.

As we walk away from the seasons of Easter and Pentecost, we likely ask the same question Simon Peter was asking along the shores of the Sea of Tiberius as he picked up his nets: “Now what?” The crucified and resurrected Jesus is sure to meet us, no matter where we go, not asking that we acknowledge that something incredible happened, but demanding that we live our lives differently because the crucified and resurrected Lord is as real today as he was then. The call to “feed my sheep” is not only heard by those who stand at a historical advantage because they lived in Galilee in the first century. The call is heard by all, for whom the resurrected Jesus is just as real today.

Amidst the chaos that defines our world, where inequality, injustice, and insecurity appear as intransigent forces impossible to escape, I am certain all of us feel the need to say “I am going fishing,” whatever “fishing” may mean. The gospel of John shows us that no matter where we go or what we do, the crucified and resurrected Lord will confront us, demanding that at all times, we feed His lambs.

– Dr. Bo Adams

