

John 21:1-14

Easter has come and gone. The disciples have seen the risen Lord on two different occasions. But now what? They were told to wait for Jesus in Galilee. But Simon Peter is never one to sit still. *"I'm going fishing!"* he blurts out. That sounds like a good idea to the others, and so seven disciples had out in a boat. It's a good diversion. And it pays the bills.

But not this time. There are no fish to be caught. This has happened before, a few years back. But Jesus was there to save the day. At His command they let out their nets and caught so many fish that it required two boats to haul them in.

But now Jesus is nowhere to be seen. For over three years He was always with them, but those days seem to be over. A stranger calls out from the shore, *"Do you have any fish?"* *"No."* they call back. *"Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some."* The man was some three hundred feet away. How could he know where the fish were? Yet they listen to this stranger and cast out their net, and they bring in 153 large fish.

That's when John says it. The four little words which send Simon Peter plunging into the water. The four little words which keep you coming back here to this house time after time. The four little words which separate the sheep from the goats, and which give you, who are Jesus' sheep, comfort and joy throughout your life. We're not told if John shouts these words or just says them matter-of-factly. It doesn't matter. What he says is true. The four little words? *"It is the Lord!"*

It is the Lord. John is perceptive. It dawns upon him, by the working of the Holy Spirit, that this is no stranger on the shore; it's Jesus; it's the Lord. Peter reacts without hesitation. Stripped for work, he puts on his outer garment and dives in. Forget about the 153 large fish, he has to go to Him...not later, but right now.

I suppose that had anyone from the shore been watching all of this, he or she would surely have wondered what was going on. It's not every day that a man jumps off a boat on the Sea of Galilee and swims a hundred yards. He or she would have seen Peter coming up on the shore with clothes soaking wet, hair a mess, huffing and puffing from exhaustion. They might have even chuckled at him. But Peter wouldn't care. It is the Lord! He has to be with Him.

We have faithful members here in our congregation, and I can assure you that there are those who are watching you too. But not to laugh. To learn, to imitate. You've been taught all your life that when you come here to this house *"It is the Lord."* It's no stranger preaching to you and absolving your sin. It's Jesus speaking and calling out to you through His messenger. When you come up to the altar and see bread and wine, you have been taught that *"It is the Lord."* It's Jesus giving Himself for you in the Sacrament. All your life you've been hearing John say, *"It is the Lord,"* and you in response - the response of faith - have acted like Peter, diving into these waters Sunday after Sunday, year after year, because you want to be with Jesus.

Simon Peter was surely very tired before and after swimming that distance. And there have been numerous times when you also have come here to God's house tired, even exhausted. You came, some of you with a cane, some with a walker, some in a wheelchair. You came even though

there were a dozen things on your “to-do” list. But you came, and you come, because you believe it is the Lord who bids you to come and promises to be here for you.

Now when Peter jumped in the water, he first put on his outer garment because he was stripped for work. And so you also, when you come here because it is the Lord, come dressed with proper attire. For some of you this means wearing the best that you have. But even more it means coming to Jesus dressed with the proper attitude. Peter didn't swim to Jesus because he had to, but because he wanted to. And that's how you come. To come here with faith is to desire to come, not because you have to come, but like Peter because you want to come.

To come here with faith is to come in humility. Not arrogant; not looking for something to criticize, but looking for mercy, because you and I know that God could criticize us up and down if He wanted to. But He doesn't. He's glad you're here. He receives you graciously. He is here to forgive you, and He does.

As Peter dove into the water to be with Jesus, so you return to the water of your baptism when you come here. This is how you are dressed properly. Not with your own goodness, but dressed with Christ, with His innocence, for in baptism this is how He dresses you.

When Peter and the other disciples came ashore, Jesus already had food there waiting for them. He did not need their 153 fish, but He used them anyway. “*Bring some...*” He said. And He invited His disciples to come and have breakfast.

This is now it is with us. Jesus does not need what we bring to Him. He doesn't bid us to come because without our works, our talents and treasures, He wouldn't be able to care for us. He already has the blessings and gifts we need. But still He uses us and what we bring to Him. And so today you will put some of the 153 fish you have caught into the offering plate. But remember that you would have nothing; your nets would be empty, except that Jesus provides for you. Do you suppose the disciples begrudgingly brought some of their fish to the Lord? Of course not. And why should you? All we have is from the Lord.

And then come, He says, and have breakfast. Not all come, but Jesus' sheep do. You come because Jesus invites you. He is here to feed you; to fill you with His gifts. You come because you need what He gives. You and I need pardon, mercy. And it's yours. Jesus forgives you of all your sins. And through you He forgives others.

This morning you are gathered here around Jesus. It's time for breakfast. You have come here because you want to be with the Lord; because it is the Lord. And because it is, you will not leave hungry, but filled. Amen.