

Series: 4 Concerns of the Church: Forgiveness, Fishing, Feeding, and Fortifying
(a Gospel of John study - similar accounts in Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:12-20; Luke 24:44-53)

Sermon Text: John 21:9-14

Key Word(s): Faith, Hope, Love

This series from John 21 is called, “*4 Concerns of the Church: Forgiveness, Fishing, Feeding, and Fortifying.*” While not our only concerns, these were important enough for John to mention after he had already said, “*I’ve left many things out!*” You may recall me calling this a 2-sermon series, but the Lord redirected me a bit, so it’ll be more than 2. Our memory verse for the series is from Matthew’s (28:19-20) account of this moment where Jesus commissioned His church by telling them to, “*Go 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.*” Last time, we learned that **Christ’s church is to be about fishing and forgiveness.** The thing is, though, we must be careful to carry out our mission in helpful rather than hurtful ways. So, with that in mind, this will be today’s...

BIG IDEA: Our mission must be carried out with faith, hope, and love.

Have you ever messed up so badly and thought that Jesus could never forgive or work through you again? Last time, we found out that no matter how we’ve messed up Jesus will always restore us if we repent. As I re-read that, I realized it might help if I explain what it means to repent, especially since it is often seen as a negative idea. For some, it invokes images of an old preacher yelling “*turn or burn.*” Maybe you’ve been idling at an intersection--windows down, enjoying some sweet tunes, when out of nowhere some dude walks up with a megaphone and screams, “*repent of your devil music or you will burn forever.*” Such encounters make repentance seem negative but listen to its definition: “*a change of mind or purpose so as to transform from one thing to another--a metamorphosis, like a caterpillar changing into a butterfly.*” When the Bible addresses repentance, it usually does so in the context of faith. Repentance of sin is about faith in God, not just being sorry or quitting a sin. It’s also not “*faith in self*”, so we must never tell people to just “*fix themselves*”, “*try harder*”, or “*never mess up again.*” Our goal isn’t to shame someone into being sorry, it’s to extend hope by speaking the truth in love (cf. Ephesians 4). True repentance produces greater affection for God than for anything else, so that faith in Him becomes the driving force of our lives.

In John 21, we see the “*way*” to call people to repentance and “*what*” it involves. Last time we read where the Apostles had fished all night and caught nothing when suddenly, Jesus showed up in *verses 4-6* and asked, “*Children, do you have any fish?*” *And they answered, “No.” Then 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. It's a cool story, which as we've said, had happened before in Luke 5 where Jesus initially called Peter, James, and John to follow Him and said, "*Don't be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.*" Notice Jesus did not motivate with fear! We also discussed how, along the way, Peter did the unthinkable--he betrayed his Rabbi (Jesus) in a very public denial around a charcoal fire (cf. John 18). In that culture, there was no coming back from this, which makes John 21 even more spectacular. You see, Jesus had picked out this spot and planned this miracle BEFORE Peter even denied Him! Listen to what He said in Matthew 26:31-32, "You will all fall away because of me this night...but after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." Let's pause there a moment and marvel at the heart of God--He was planning a huge restoration event for a bunch of guys who He knew would betray and forsake Him! Are any of us like that? I mean, are we in the habit of pursuing people who betray or hurt us with offers of forgiveness and restoration, or is our predetermined plan simply to shame, cancel, and write them off? Remember, God's love goes towards enemies--He doesn't wait until they come crawling back to Him. As I said last time, "Jesus calls us to become fishers who go out into the sea of humanity and rescue those who are drowning in sin." Since that's the mission His Father sent Him to carry out, then that's what it means to follow Him!

Let's read a little further in *verses 9-14* where we're told that *when they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. Jesus said, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." So, Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn. Then Jesus said, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared ask, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. This was the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.* All the images (the big catch of fish, the charcoal fire, the breakfast, the conversation) speak to the church's mission and how we're to carry it out. So, consider 3 things we learn from Jesus about calling people to repentance and faith.

First, Jesus didn't condemn Peter. Instead of walking up all frowny faced with His arms crossed, Jesus chose to re-create the enjoyable memory of when Peter was first called to be an apostle. I love this about the Christian faith--it summons us to remember God's goodness and believe. John 13, for instance, beckons us to remember His body and blood shed for us and to believe. 1 Peter 3 tells us to remember our baptism and believe. God gave us these physical experiences as a tangible way for us to remember and believe! He never wants us to forget that Christ's life, death, and resurrection has paid our sin debt in full! Romans 8:1 declares, "*There is no further condemnation for those in Christ.*" So,

when calling people to repentance and faith, especially other believers, we must do it like God does by inviting them to remember His goodness, not by piling on guilt, shame, and condemnation. What can we learn from Jesus about calling people to repentance and faith? **First, Jesus didn't condemn Peter.**

Second, Jesus brought joy to Peter's heart. Do you see how this moment shaped Peter's ministry? Without it, he could've become one of those zealous Christians (parents) who don't tolerate stuff like compromise, weakness, or failure. In other words, he could've become nothing like Jesus or like Paul, who in 2 Corinthians 12 said that *"God's strength is displayed best on the stage of our weakness."* Do you use "intolerance" and "tough love" to keep others on track, or are you more like Jesus who set up a fun fishing trip and cooked breakfast for a guy who betrayed and hurt Him? While it's right to have a holy hatred for sin, our methods of redemption must be rooted in faith rather than fear. Fear can lead us to be *"tough on crime"* when we wrongly think that being kind equals affirmation. Faith teaches us that being good to the just and the unjust makes us like God (cf. Matthew 5). Fear and shame-based ministry (or parenting) doesn't bring joy--it produces sad, angry, critical, pessimistic people who are depressing to be around. Jesus didn't use fear tactics, nor did He ever say to His kids, *"If you mess up one more time, I'm done with you!"* It may sound rational, but that brand of conservative Christianity is destructive. Consider what Professor Gary Burge said about it in his commentary on John (pg. 596), *"It produces a spiritual regimen that is merely a Protestant penance. 'Because I failed God, because I have failed myself, I have a lot to make up for.' Such a ministry knows nothing of the 'rejoicing heart' Jesus promised to his followers in John 16:22."* Do you realize that the difference between appropriate shame and toxic shame is life and death? The Apostle Paul realized this while writing to the stubborn church in 2 Corinthians 7:9-10: *"I do not rejoice because you were grieved by my letter, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death."* Our mission is not to drive folks into deeper despair but into the loving arms of our forgiving Savior. What can we learn from Jesus about calling people to repentance and faith? **First, Jesus didn't condemn Peter. Second, Jesus brought joy to Peter's heart.**

Third, Jesus wants our work to be driven by faith. John 21 isn't a story of skilled fishermen going out and gathering lots of fish. It's a story of desperate, impatient men resorting to what felt familiar as they waited for Jesus to show up, and it produced NOTHING! Furthermore, no experienced fisherman would've cast just one net and expected this kind of haul--a second net was needed to encircle the fish. My point is the same point Jesus made in John 15:5, *"Without Jesus we can do nothing!"* The church's

mission isn't to *"try our best and hope Jesus will bless however we go about it."* It's to depend on Him to lead us by faith as we fish for and offer redemption to others. It can seem ridiculous, impossible, or exhausting to forgive wrongdoing, but faith reminds us that Jesus, through His Holy Spirit, joins us in our mission and lifts the burden of our work. When **our mission is carried out with faith, hope, and love**, the surprising result will not be grief and exhaustion but fruits like joy and peace. I'll close with one more comment from Professor Burge that also sets up what we'll talk about next time: *"The work of the church can only go forward when we are unburdened of our destructive memories through the gracious forgiveness of God."* (Burge, 596).

Let's pray: Father, you have called us to a wonderful and fulfilling mission of sharing the good news of your gospel with people from every nation, tribe, and tongue. May we not presume upon the riches of your kindness, forbearance, and patience by remembering that it's your kindness that leads us and everyone else to repentance. Amen. (Based on Romans 2)

So, what's your NEXT STEP?

- Remember, our next step always begins with faith in Christ. Either placing faith in Him for the first time or exercising faith to repent, change, and grow. Either way, His Spirit will help you.

Preparing for and applying our sermon from John 21:9-14.

- Take a deep breath and ask God to speak to you as you read this passage. Share a few of your impressions and takeaways from these passages.
- How have I experienced others judging me, shaming me and being "righteously critical"? How have I done this to others?
- In fear, we often resort to human "weapons" but those never work. What does 2 Corinthians 10:4 tell us about why those don't work?
- Are you at all like Jesus? Do you pursue those who betray or hurt you with offers of forgiveness and restoration, or have you already decided beforehand that you'll shame, cancel, and write them off? Please share some examples.

Other Articles/Songs/Videos: Please ask us about many other resources.

Quotes related to this passage:

- **The point of John 21:** "These are not stories that affirm the reality of the resurrection or the truth of Jesus' message. The fishing miracle of chapter 21 is not a sign for unbelievers, compelling them to believe in the resurrected Christ. Chapter 21 is an epilogue addressed to the church and its responsibilities and work in the world. The principal story in the chapter—the great catch of fish and Jesus' subsequent conversation around the morning fire—reinforces the apostolic commission to take responsibility for those who come into the kingdom of Christ. Peter is to be fisherman and shepherd; some followers even may be called to be martyrs, but each has a task to glorify God by obediently following Jesus...The catch of fish, for instance, likely has little numerical symbolism. This is simply a miracle of abundance not unlike the

enormous volume of wine in Cana (ch. 2) or Jesus' distribution of bread (ch. 6). Nevertheless, the miraculous sign may symbolize the work of Peter that now Jesus wishes to direct. It is no accident that the Beloved Disciple points us to what is most important in the story. This is his literary role on many occasions. He is the one who recognizes Jesus' identity (21:7) when others cannot; and when Peter races to the shore, he is the one who stays with the fish, bringing them laboriously to land. Peter's zeal is outdone again by John's perception and insight. The fish—as practical gift and symbol of divine work—must not be neglected.” (Burge, 592-593)

- **Simply a large catch of 153:** “Jerome claimed that ancient zoologists counted 153 kinds of fish, but extant copies of their writings do not support his hypothesis, which may have stemmed from an attempt to explain this verse; various counts of their number circulated. Various symbolic interpretations of ‘153’ have been offered (from Hebrew words that total 153 when their numerical value is reckoned, to it being a triangular number that would have impressed ancient Pythagorean philosophers). But ancient miracle stories would stress numbers to heighten the reality of the miracle (e.g., 2 Kings 19:35); 153 is no doubt used because the disciples were impressed enough to have counted the fish. (What fishermen would not have counted such a catch?) The risen Lord has provided them more fish than they could possibly eat by themselves.” (Keener, 312)
- **Repentance.** “The willful turning from sin and toward Christ in true sorrow and humility. It’s only possible through the work of the Holy Spirit, who gives us a greater affection for God than for sin, and as such it is closely related to the Spirit’s work of regeneration and the gift of faith. True repentance is more than remorse; it involves mortification and results in a change of mind, heart and action. In his Ninety-Five Theses, Luther noted that repentance is not merely a solitary event but constitutes the entire lives of believers. (Kapic, 101-102)
- **Gleaning takeaways:** “In order to develop John 21 for an audience today, we should also probe the personal issues in Peter’s life and make them a paradigm for personal health in ministry today. The work of the church—the gathering of fish, the nurture of sheep—cannot go forward unless its ministers are healed of their histories and renewed by God’s Spirit.” (Burge, 593)

Quotes related to the larger context:

- **Controversy over chapter 21:** “Scholars are divided over the literary history and role of John 21. Some view it as a vital and necessary conclusion to the Gospel, intimately linked to the previous twenty chapters. Others conclude that this final chapter is a supplement to the Gospel, an addition penned either by the same author who wrote chapters 1–20 or by his disciples (who identify themselves in 21:24) ...At the same time, however, there is no evidence in the manuscript tradition that this Gospel ever circulated without this final chapter. Burge, 580.
- **No manuscripts without chapter 21:** “Jesus appears to his disciples by the sea. Some scholars have supposed that this chapter is by another author, but there is no manuscript evidence of the circulation of the gospel without it. Although it appears to be something in the nature of an afterthought, it may have been intended to correspond to the prologue. It is unlikely that another author wrote this section since there are several points of contact in it with the style and language of the previous chapters.” (Guthrie, 1063)
- **Full life:** John said he wrote this letter to help us find “*fullness of life through believing Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.*” Chapters 1-12 contain 3 years of real-life stories where people met Jesus during His public ministry. Chapters 13-21 slow way down as Jesus began to reveal His (God’s) heart to His disciples in the week leading up to the cross and resurrection.

- **Book Context:** The Gospel of the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee, provides a clearly stated purpose. *John 20:30-31* says, “*Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 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.*” Some people demand to have all their questions satisfied before bowing to Jesus, yet John claimed his limited account was enough to bring anyone to faith. As we read it, our Savior and friend emerges from the pages as a real person in the real world. Jesus shows us what we could become, if we too would rely on His infinite Father who will gladly supply whatever we need.
- **Life in his name:** Life is the Greek word, “zōē”, which means “Life, Living, Lifetime, Life-Giving” and is where we get the word, “zoology” in English. Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words says it’s “used in the NT of life as a principle, life in the absolute sense, life as God has it, that which the Father has in Himself, and which He gave to the Incarnate Son to have in Himself, Jhn 5:26, and which the Son manifested in the world, 1Jo 1:2. From this life man has become alienated in consequence of the Fall, Eph 4:18, and of this life men become partakers through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, Jhn 3:15, who becomes its Author to all such as trust in Him, Act 3:15, and who is therefore said to be ‘the life’ of the believer, Col 3:4, for the life that He gives He maintains, Jhn 6:35, 63. Eternal life is the present actual possession of the believer because of his relationship with Christ, Jhn 5:24; 1Jo 3:14, and that it will one day extend its domain to the sphere of the body is assured by the Resurrection of Christ, 2Cr 5:4; 2Ti 1:10. This life is not merely a principle of power and mobility, however, for it has moral associations which are inseparable from it, as of holiness and righteousness. Death and sin, life and holiness, are frequently contrasted in the Scriptures.”

Bibliography (Note: Our use of these materials does not imply full agreement with them)

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Direction for discussion leaders:

1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.

2. Keep the discussion around 30 mins. Go for a single, not a home run.
3. Keep the group small for deeper sharing. Once you hit the “sweet spot”, spend your time there.
4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

Some great resources for digging deeper into community group life:

How life together looks <http://austinstone.org/stories/film/item/140-missional-community-lukes-story>

Rethinking what we do https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvWnXYSELF4&feature=player_embedded

Numerous articles to provoke thought <http://toddengstrom.com/archives/>

What groups of 2-3 might look like <http://toddengstrom.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/LTG-Overview.pdf>