

A BIBILICAL FISH STORY.

(start out with some bio - high school, university, parents ect)

I want to thank all of you in this church for the Christian foundation you've provided for me over these past 18 years, and the opportunities I've had to participate in the worship services in the past. It has been extremely meaningful to me. And I do understand that going to college is not a license to skip church for four years.

Our passage today from the 21st CHAPTER OF JOHN is a familiar passage – and to the disciples the circumstances should have been very familiar, because if you go back to the beginning of the relationship between Christ and the disciples, found in LUKE CHAPTER 5, you would find that when Jesus first encountered his future disciples, they were common fishermen who'd been out all night fishing in the Sea of Galilee and caught nothing. Just like in our passage today.

In the Luke scripture, Jesus told them to go out to the deep water and cast their nets, which they did and they caught so many fish their nets were breaking and the boats almost sank. When they got back to shore that's when Jesus asked them to leave their belonging and follow him because from that point forward they were going to be fishers of men.

Back to our scripture today from John. This is taking place shortly after the crucifixion and resurrection. Jesus has shown himself to the disciples twice already. The disciples had experienced a great loss, but also had experienced great joy having twice been visited by the risen Savior. But on this evening they were doing what came natural to them – going out fishing, again on the Sea of Galilee. At daybreak, as they came back from a full night of fishing and having caught nothing, they encountered Jesus standing on the shore but they didn't realize it was him. Jesus asked them if they'd caught anything and the answer was no, at which point he told them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat, which they did and they caught what was later determined to be 153 fish. There are so many parallels to their first meeting in Luke. But it wasn't until this point in this encounter that John realized who had directed them and said ---- “IT IS THE LORD!”.

At this point Peter, no doubt overcome with emotion, jumped in the water and swam to shore because they were only about 100 yards off shore. The others remained on the boat and brought their haul to shore. Jesus then had them come have a breakfast of the fish and broken bread.

It was during this breakfast that Jesus three times asked Peter, the same Peter who denied him three times leading up to the crucifixion, if he loved him. Each time Peter expressed his love for the Savior.

Each time Jesus had a simple but very meaningful response.

The first time, he replied FEED MY LAMBS.

The second time, he replied TEND MY SHEEP.

The third time, FEED MY SHEEP.

The third encounter with the risen Christ is filled with symbolism. First is the symbolism of the fishermen becoming fishers of men, relating back to that passage in Luke. The risen Lord is ascending to heaven, and it will be the work of the disciples to spread the good news. The directions to Peter to FEED MY LAMBS, TEND MY SHEEP and FEED MY SHEEP represent Jesus designating Peter to serve as the head of the church.

The symbolism of fishermen as the FUTURE of the church. The water represents the human condition, the fish are the people, and the fishers of men --- the disciples, are going to be tasked with pulling people out of the troubling waters of this world with the good news of the Gospel with the resurrection and the forgiveness of sins.

There is the symbolism of following DIVINE GUIDANCE and having the FAITH to accept divine guidance. The disciples as fishermen worked all night and caught nothing, they were doing it their way and it didn't work. But when they followed what turned out to be Divine guidance about where to drop their nets, their nets were filled beyond belief. Even though they'd been up all night, and even though they hadn't caught one thing, they had the FAITH to try again. That's a life lesson we can use – if we're doing something our way, and it's not working, perhaps we trust in the Lord to direct us to the proper path and have faith that his path is the right path. The catching of the fish in the scripture could represent in our lives job opportunities, in my case educational opportunities, opportunities to serve others, opportunities for new friends and relationships – any number of things – if we are willing to listen for the divine guidance and have the faith to accept and follow it.

There is the symbolism of a great bounty resulting from following divine guidance and a demonstration of the Lord's dominion over all things on the earth.

The symbolism of Peter jumping from the boat into the water to swim to Jesus – just like he is supposed to leap into the world post resurrection to lead the Christian church.

And finally Jesus' repeated questioning of Peter about whether Peter loves him symbolizes forgiveness, forgiveness for the three times Peter denied knowing Jesus.

Isn't it amazing that the relationship between Jesus and his disciples here on earth began and ended with a Biblical fish story. Fish stories that we tell are often exaggerations as the size of the fish and it gets bigger with every telling – like the first fish I ever caught in the pond on hole #2 up at Jefferson Landing was THIS BIG, but these Biblical fish stories that are full of meaning and symbolism, both for the disciples and for us. I hope after you leave this service today you'll continue to think about all the lessons these Biblical fish stories were meant to convey – lessons meant to help us in our daily lives, lessons to guide us to living a Christian life of love, faith and forgiveness.

Thank you for allowing me to speak with you today.