

Hope PCA Sermon: July 14, 2024
"Abundance in Jesus" (John 21:1-14)
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Good morning. It's good to be with you all. It's been many years since I've been to this church, but I my family lives in Bellevue and I went to high school right up the hill from this church at Bellevue Christian. So I've driven past this building many times and have been serving in Issaquah the last four years. So it's a pleasure to be with you this morning to bring the Word. My family's here with me and we're all glad to be here with you. today.

So I'd invite you to turn with me to John chapter 21 for our scripture reading. John chapter 21, and I will read verses 1 through 14, and then I'll pray for us. Hear the Word of the Lord:

¹ After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. ² Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. ³ Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴ Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered him, "No." ⁶ 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. ⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. ⁸ The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.

⁹ When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." ¹¹ 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. ¹² Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Join me in prayer.

Heavenly Father, we come to you this morning. We are in your presence. We need to hear from your Word, and I thank you for speaking to us through this your Word, for giving us this unique and powerful story, one that shows us what you are doing in this age, in your world, and the way in which you do it. Pray for you to instruct us, guide us, shape us, how you would, how you will, Lord, through our time this morning. We pray this all in the name of Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

You may be seated.

So this text in John chapter 21 is the third time that John records Jesus being revealed to the disciples after his resurrection. We see two other occurrences of this in John chapter 20, where Jesus comes to them twice, and in John 20 he sends the disciples in his and the Father's name. He breathes on them so they receive the Holy Spirit. And through this, the disciples know that they are his apostles in the world, witnesses to how Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah of God, who brings life to the world. We read in John 20, 30, and 31, which is known as John's purpose statement, that he wrote his gospel so that those who read it might know and believe Jesus Christ, Jesus is the Christ, and have life in his name.

So this might make us ask a question: why do we have this third appearance in John 21? Why do we have this third appearance? Jesus has risen from the dead and already sent his disciples. The disciples, we read, are back in Galilee, and they go fishing on the Sea of Tiberias, which is another name for the Sea of Galilee. They've already seen Jesus, they've been sent by him, but in this moment, they might have been wondering about how Jesus would do what he sent them to do. This is a place where our familiarity with what comes next in the Book of Acts might keep us from feeling what the disciples felt. But just imagine for a moment being in their shoes. You might have had questions about how God would carry out his plan as well.

Well, today we have questions similar to these ourselves. We live in a world with political turmoil. The Christian life wasn't meant to be easy. Jesus told us that in this world we would have tribulation. But it seems to be getting harder to be a faithful Christian in our time of history and our specific location in the world. Recent studies have shown how, in the last 25 years, America has seen the largest change in Christianity in its history, and it's a change downward. 40 million people have stopped attending church once a year, church regularly, in the last 25 years. We live in an area where 64% of people attend a religious service one time or less per year. And living in an area like this can wear on us. We see the consequences of sin around us. We know and feel the weight of sin in our own lives. All of this can leave us sad and discouraged. You wonder what God is doing. We can even question if following Jesus is worth it. And the truth is we all need assurance in the Christian life. And we have that sort of assurance in John chapter 21.

This morning as I walk through this passage, I want us to see how Jesus, the risen Lord, is bringing in an abundant kingdom harvest. He's bringing in an abundant kingdom harvest. I want us to see also how he delights to use us in this work, delights to use us. So I'll highlight three ways out of our text this morning that Jesus assures us of the fact that he's bringing in a kingdom harvest. My first point will be his *manner* second point, his *effect*. and third, his *provision*.

So let's go into his manner, his manner. Jesus works in ways that we don't expect. If you look in verse 1 and then down all the way in verse 14, you'll see the word "*revealed*" in both verses. This repetition marks what signals to be a section or an inclusio that is all about Jesus revealing himself. The story continues after verse 14, the conversation continues, but here, John is highlighting Jesus revealing himself. Jesus is the same Jesus as he was before his death, and he's also different in that he comes and goes. He passes through doors that are locked, through walls. And in this appearance, this third appearance, Jesus highlights his power. If you observe with me the progression in verses 1 through 6, we see God's power at work.

In verses 1 through 3, the disciples fish at night and they don't catch anything. Then in verses 4 through 6, they have a very different result. But we need to ask the question: should these disciples even be fishing on a boat in the first place? Fishing was their old occupation. Aren't they supposed to be witnessing for Jesus? Some say that the disciples had no business going back to their old occupation. They even go so far as to say this was an act of apostasy. But this seems to be a little bit extreme because the disciples had indeed followed Jesus's word to go back to Galilee and they needed to eat like all of us. That being said, it does seem likely that in following Peter's invitation to fish, some of the disciples may have thought, "Well, we're back home. What's going to happen now? Maybe I will go back to fishing after all."

Nighttime was the best time to catch fish, especially the final hours before sunrise. But our text tells us the disciples caught nothing. Then as the sun is coming up, the time when most would be calling it a night, the disciples hear Jesus from the shore. He says, "*Children, do you have any fish?*" Verse 4 says they didn't know it was Jesus, either because it was early morning or because they weren't expecting him. In verse 6, he tells them to "*cast [their] net on the right side ... and you will find some.*" One scholar comments that doing this sort of thing at this point in the day, after sunrise, is highly unlikely to yield any fish. We might describe this as a desperation heave. One last try, right? But the men do it and they pull in this huge catch of fish. In verse 7, John immediately tells Peter, "*It is the Lord!*". It is the Lord. It's the work of the all-knowing, all-powerful Lord of all. John Calvin says that we see God's power at work both in the large catch of fish that we read about here, and also that this large catch didn't break the net, which verse 11 highlights for us. In this unexpected moment, the Lord provides in abundance.

And this illustrates an important principle for us today: illustrates that everything comes by Christ's blessing. As Chris prayed for in his prayer this morning: in everyday life, and especially in God's kingdom, it all comes from God. It comes by his blessing. You might remember that this isn't the first time that Jesus has given fishing advice. In Luke chapter 5, the disciples become disciples after Jesus provides another abundant catch of fish. As Jesus tells Peter in that story, "From now on you will be fishing for men." John in his gospel is known to use double meanings. And here, similar to Luke 5, these fish are both an abundant supply of food and they symbolize an abundant catch of people for God's kingdom. They point to the harvest to come. And since this miracle takes place after Jesus's resurrection, it emphasizes how the disciples are sent by him and they will see his spirit work mightily through them in bringing people to saving faith.

I want to make one more observation about the beginning of this passage in the catch of fish. It's somewhat subtle, but notice when things change for the disciples on their fishing journey. Things change when Jesus speaks. This should prompt us to be attentive to how God might be leading us and working through his Word day by day. As Jesus says in John 5 verse 17, "My father is working until now and I am working." Jesus continues on his work today through his Holy Spirit. He's always working and he wants us to be watching for how he's working. A great example of this comes from 2 Kings 6-7 in the time of Elisha. In those chapters we read of Syria coming and putting Israel under siege. They have the city of Samaria under siege on all sides. And the Israelites are starving, and they've resorted to cannibalism. And yet, in this time, this terrible time for God's people, the Lord gives Elisha and his servant eyes to see the surrounding mountains full of horses and chariots of fire, an army from God, and an army that God delivers his people with. But only Elisha and his servant

actually see this army. God was working, but would his people believe and live by his word through Elisha when they heard it?

Well, the same question is true for us today. God's kingdom is a place where he does unexpected things, and we need to expect the unexpected. as members of his kingdom. The difficulties and tragedies and disappointments of this life in this world, the devil's temptations, these things can all wear us down. They can wear down the expectation that we have for God to work in our hearts, but they don't need to because God gives us reason to walk by faith and not by sight in his Word and in his son, Jesus Christ. He died, he was raised, he reigns in heaven, and he is indeed interceding for us in this very moment. He has been working by his Spirit the past 2,000 years to make his gospel and blessings go to the ends of the earth. And he often does this through people and in ways that we wouldn't expect. This should lead us to follow him, to trust his promises, to pray more and more boldly for his kingdom to come. There will, of course, be times of trial and discouragement, times where nothing seems to be happening, where we have no idea what God is doing. But he is working. And difficult times like this keep us humble and dependent upon him. And the Lord in his wisdom teaches us valuable lessons in times of trial.

So that is God's manner, it's Christ's manner. He works in unexpected ways. But now you might be asking, "What about when we don't walk by faith? What about when I don't pray boldly?" Even if we aspire to do these things, we still wander. We doubt much more than we want to. This brings me to the second way that Jesus assures us of what he is doing, his effect. Jesus draws people to come to him again and again.

Look back with me in verse 7 of our text, if you have your Bibles still open. John, the disciple who Jesus loved, declares to Peter, "*It is the Lord!*". Now, we don't know if John physically recognizes Jesus. But we do know that he sees Jesus with the eyes of faith and he witnesses to him. John is the witness. We read all of his witness through the 21 chapters of his gospel and his letters and the book of Revelation, the end of the New Testament. Peter responds to John's witness in earnest zeal. He wraps his garments around himself and jumps into the water to swim to the Lord. We see in verse 8 the other disciples follow, coming to Jesus as well.

Some describe Peter's actions here negatively. They call him impulsive, even impetuous. They say he's leaving the other disciples in the middle of a job. Where is his sense of duty and commitment? But when I consider Peter's journey, what he has been through, I'm not convinced by these statements. Think about what Peter has been through in the previous days. He told Jesus he wouldn't deny him, and then he did. He deserted his Lord as he went to the cross. Since then, Jesus saw the empty tomb. He has been with Jesus, the risen Lord, but even still, he likely has doubts about his fitness to be a disciple. Think about a time when you have done something that you are really ashamed of. Maybe it hits you and you're flooded with shame or guilt. In these times, you need reassurance again and again, especially from the people you've hurt and those that you love. Well, I think that something like that is going on here with Peter. In this moment, the risen Jesus stands on the shore and he knows Peter's past and he invites Peter to come to him through simply standing there. In verse 7, both John's faith and witness and Peter's zeal point us to Jesus's work in his kingdom, to how he works.

By God's grace, he calls different people to himself and he uses different people in mighty ways. Think about John. He had seen Jesus's sufferings. He was with him until the end. He wasn't perfect, though. He too fell asleep in the garden of Gethsemane, and Jesus told him to stay awake and pray, but he saw Jesus dying on the cross, dying that he might live, and now he witnesses. Peter's story is different. He has already received the peace from God, from Jesus in John chapter 20, but here he jumps and swims to Jesus simply because he loves him and wants to be with him. If you look further in this chapter in verses 15 through 17, you read this famous dialogue where Peter gets something even better than being in the Lord's presence. Jesus restores him and he gives him this great calling to shepherd his flock, to feed his lambs, to tend his sheep. He's already forgiven Peter through dying for him. And in his grace and kindness, Jesus now gives Peter a chance to wipe out his memory of the threefold denial by a threefold declaration of love. That's how one person describes this: a threefold declaration of love. After Peter was restored and the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, he too was a witness to the Lord Jesus. This wasn't easy for Peter. We know from tradition that the Lord had it for Peter to go and die, just like Jesus did, though he was crucified upside down. Peter was restored and used by God, and he went to death for Christ's sake, all because he loved Jesus, the one who loved him first and drew him in.

This morning I want to draw two takeaways from this restoration that we see in John 21. First takeaway is to hurry to Jesus, hurry to Jesus like Peter did, again and again, day after day. When you are weary, when you grieve, when you doubt, when you're ashamed, when you have neglected your duty, when you have slipped into a destructive habit, when you are proud, when you genuinely think he won't take you back. Hurry to Jesus, be honest with him, name your sin and turn to him. Our confession says that all sin deserves damnation, but also that there is no sin so great that it cannot bring damnation upon those who truly repent. Jesus's yoke is easy and his burden is light because he gave himself and bought us with his blood. We have life, we are restored, not in what we do, but in looking to Jesus. And as we look to him, he sets our eyes on the glory that he will bring and on knowing him and the power of his resurrection in this life and in the life that we look forward to.

Second takeaway is that we are to hurry to Jesus so that other people see him and come to him. Think about how personal it becomes for Peter after this chapter. Jesus asks Peter if he loves him three times. And Peter lives out this love by following him all the way to death. Now we live in a day where people are leaving the church. Some people simply slip away through things like global pandemics. Some have been in the church, but have never grasped or embraced the gospel. They've never looked to Christ for life. As we have been preparing to plant a church, I've been struck by how much opportunity is out there, just right in front of us. I had a cross-country trip a few weeks ago. And I had some amazing conversations on the plane, just saying hello to someone, asking them questions, and listening. People have great needs. They long for hope. They long for community. They long for purpose, freedom, and peace. And Jesus Christ offers all of this and more. God is still working, and he calls us to join with him in his work. by befriending people, asking them questions, listening well, and then humbly yet boldly bearing witness for Christ about the truth of the gospel, what Christ has done, the new creation that he has brought in his world. Our witness is fueled as we hurry to him ourselves each day and as we pray for opportunities to share about him and see what he brings. Jesus is drawing people to himself. He will keep doing that until he comes back, and he wills and delights to use us in this work, just as he has drawn us to himself. So Jesus works in unexpected ways, and then he restores people again and again.

Now I want to move on to the third way that Jesus assures us. For here we see where this is all going. Jesus' provision. Jesus provides abundantly for all who come to him. We see this in the scene on the shore in verses 9 through 14. And I want to highlight three things from this scene for us.

First, Jesus provides abundantly by restoring us. In verse 9, he has made a charcoal fire much like the charcoal fire Peter stood by in John chapter 18 when he denied Jesus. On this fire, Jesus prepares a meal and restores Peter. In his kindness, he unburdens Peter of the guilt that would haunt him and assures him that he is forgiven. We all long for this sort of pardon and restoration ourselves. People around us do as well. And Jesus gives it to us. His kindness leads us to repentance. And he restores us through his grace and power.

The second way that we see Jesus provide is that he provides through using us. And this is a little bit maybe surprising to hear, but we see it in this story. In verse 10, Jesus says, "*Bring some of the fish you have just caught.*" In verse 11, we read that there were 153 fish — not 154, not 152, but 153. Through history, there's been much discussion about the significance of this number. Jerome said that it signified the 153 species of fish known in the ancient world, and it pointed to all nations being netted for Christ. Cyril of Alexandria said it represented 100 pagans, 50 Jews, and the three persons of the Trinity. More recently, it's been related to the vision of the river that flows out of the temple in Ezekiel 47, a river that teems with fish and produces abundant life wherever it flows. Ultimately, we don't know if John had a specific symbolic meaning in mind with this number. All we do know is that there were 153 fish, and that's a lot of fish. And we also know that through these fish, Jesus shows us how he intends to multiply and bless his disciples' efforts among all peoples. Through his disciples, through us today, Jesus builds his church. He brings people to believe in him, to know him, to love him, just as he prayed for in John 17, also that the earth would be filled with the knowledge of him as the waters cover the sea. He is doing this here through your weekly worship at Hope Presbyterian Church, through your ministries, through your care and love for each other, through your hospitality to anyone who comes, through your lives of service to him.

The third way that we see Jesus provide is as our host. He provides abundantly as our host. In verse 12, he says, "*Come and have breakfast.*" Verse 13: he gives them bread and fish to eat and enjoy. In the end of verse 12, we see something curious. It says, none of them dared ask him who he was, but that they knew it was the Lord. Why don't they say something more than this, in this moment? Well, I think here of how we might feel when we see someone famous that we respect greatly and we see them in person. We want to say hi and tell them how much of a fan we are of them and their work, and then we chicken out, right? Has this ever happened to you? Happened to me a few weeks ago. How much more would this be the case for the disciples with Jesus in this moment? They're just in awe at the resurrected Lord, the one who was, who is, and who is to come, the beginning and the firstborn of the dead, the one who sits with them at this meal, who feeds them and assures them of his provision before he ascends to his heavenly throne. As Psalm 23 says, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." Jesus's provision in this meal shows his love and kindness to his own in a sinful world. And I would agree with another pastor who says that it also shows forth his love such that even his enemies might know their need and come to him themselves. Prepares the table in the presence of His enemies.

Brothers and sisters, the same Lord is at work in his world by his Spirit today. And in this story, he makes it clear that he loves us, that he restores us, and that he delights to use us in his work. This

story comes just before the Great Commission that we read of in the end of Matthew. And similarly, it's the basis for this message of salvation and life and Jesus spreading around the globe such that people who had no idea about the Israelites or Jesus or the Bible centuries ago are now going around the globe themselves as missionaries. It is the reason that we can rejoice, that we belong to him, that we can thank him for his provision, encourage each other when we are down, and witness to Jesus and his work in our lives.

Finally, this story gives us eternal hope. The catch and meal of John 21 point us to the joy that will come when Jesus returns to the marriage supper of the Lamb. With the Lord Jesus and saints from all nations and ages rejoicing in him, giving him glory and enjoying his presence forevermore. As Psalm 23 finishes, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Following God, it's not always easy. It means dying to ourselves for Christ's sake. It means the Lord's discipline, times of difficulty, times of unknown. In these times, we can be tempted to worry. The devil seeks us out and tells us it's all futile. But we can follow Jesus, confident that he died to give us life, that he restores us, that he is working, and that he delights to use us. He delights to use you in his work. As he says, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Hear also his words from John 16 verse 22. He says, "You have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take that joy from you." The disciples heard these words before Jesus died and rose, and they saw him again. We read of it here in John 21.

Will we today hear these words, having seen Jesus with the eyes of faith? And we too will see him again. May we humbly and boldly serve our risen Lord, trusting that he came to give us life abundance, that he provides for us, and that he is pleased to use us in his kingdom. Amen?

Pray with me.

Lord Jesus, you are worthy. Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that you are Lord, to the glory of God the Father. We live in a world with so many needs, and sometimes it seems like a losing battle. But Lord Jesus, if you and the Father and the Spirit are for us, who can be against us? I thank you for stories like ours today where you show us what you are doing in your world and how you chose us that we might bear fruit, fruit that abides forever. Strengthen each of us this day through your Word, work by your Spirit to build us up and feed us now as we come to your meal that you have given for us. We pray this all with hope and joy in our hearts, Jesus. Amen.