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Easter 3

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Gone Fishin’ ”
Text: John 21:1-19

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
[He is risen indeed! Alleluia!] Alleluia.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Gone fishin'!

That's the proverbial vacation sign, isn't it? The sign on the door of the business that's closed because we need to get away, to spend some time alone, to clear our minds, to rest and recover from the hustle and bustle of life. Maybe for you it's not fishing, but golf, or a good book, or a good movie or TV show, or something else. Just something to get away and do something completely different for a while.

Gone fishin'!

That's what those seven disciples did that day. The past few days - or weeks - had put them through the wringer. There had been so many ups and downs, so many emotions. Jesus' grand Palm Sunday entrance, but then His arrest. How they had all let Him down and run away in fear. The horror of the crucifixion, the confusion of the empty tomb, and then the joy of seeing Jesus again! Yes, He is risen! He is no longer dead, they knew. But the Jews weren't dead either. They were still like lambs in the midst of wolves. Maybe even moreso now . . .

So they go back to Galilee. Home sweet home. To the Sea of Tiberias - which is just another name for their home away from home, the Sea of Galilee. And they go fishin'. Tired in body, tired in mind, tired in soul, they need some R&R: rest and relaxation. Maybe the splash of the waves and the smell of the sea would put some life back into them.

Or maybe not. You know how hard it is to turn off your mind; to disengage. It's one thing to put your body in a place like that; it's another to get your mind to cooperate. Thoughts and memories, care and concerns, keep intruding, don't they? And so also maybe with these seven wrung out disciples. Even as they're casting out their net . . . Peter's thinking about His denials, Thomas is still embarrassed of

his doubting, and James and John are still kicking themselves for having asked for the places of honor at Jesus' right and life.

And then they haul in the net . . . nothing. Ain't that the way? They can't even do that right.

But then they hear a voice from the shore: *Hey guys, you don't have any fish, do you?* Proud fishermen probably would have gotten angry at such a remark; but they're too tired, too preoccupied, to get angry. They don't have the strength of mind or body to get angry. What's the use? So they simply answer: no. They got nothing.

You know what that's like too. To come back empty-handed. You tried hard, you wanted to succeed, even just a little. At work, at school, maybe even as a Christian - to be the kind of Christian your risen Lord would be proud of! A fisher of men! Devoted to the Word, constant in prayer, always joyful and hopeful and kind and loving . . . and at the end of the day, you got nothin'. You yelled at your kids again, you put off your prayers until you forgot about them, the Scriptures stayed on the shelf, and maybe you went through the whole day and didn't even think about Jesus once! *Hey guys, you don't have any fish, do you?* . . . No. No we don't. Great!

Yes, actually. Great! For now our Lord has us right where He wants us. So that He can provide, so that He can work, so that He can heal us and raise us and refresh us. Because as long as we have something of our own to hang onto in this world, we will. Something - *even one little fish in that net* - to prove that we're not failures, that we can do *something*, even if it's just a little! To show that Jesus didn't choose me for nothing . . .

But what do you have? *You don't have any fish, do you?*

Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

But their failure doesn't make Jesus leave; in fact, it is the very reason why He is there! Because while the tomb was empty, there was no "Gone fishin'!" sign on it. Jesus was not raised from the dead for some R&R after all His work for us, but to continue His work for us. That by His being raised to life again, He raise us to life, give us what we do not have, and provide the peace of mind we so need in the forgiveness of our sins and failures. And so what they could not do, Jesus does. *Cast the net out again*, He says. And this time, it is not only filled, it is an abundance!

For when Jesus gives, He never just gives a little. He heals all the way, He raises all the way, He gives an abundance.

And so now for you. For how great is your sin? How vast the emptiness of your hands? Your Lord fills you now with His forgiveness and life. Not a little, but an abundance! *I forgive you all your sins*, He said. And all means all. Not one left that you have to make up for. Not one left to weigh you down. Not one left to shame you or humiliate you or make you doubt. The cross has cancelled all your sin, so that you have the joy of forgiveness overflowing. So that when life has you wrung out and hung out to dry, you be here refreshed and raised again.

And that's what happens to those seven disciples. From empty to filled, John calls out in joy to Peter, ***"It is the Lord!"*** And Peter, from sorrowful to joyful, jumps out of the boat to be with His Saviour. And, I like to think, when Peter got to the shore, he gave Jesus a big, wet bear hug - which would have suited Jesus just fine, for that's how He likes us: soaking wet from living in the joyful waters of our baptism. Soaking wet from jumping into those waters every day, as every day we confess our sins and receive our Lord's forgiveness. As every day we are born again as children of God. As every day we remember and rejoice in the life and grace our Saviour gives to us.

But there's even more. More that Jesus has to give. For after Peter scampers to shore, after the rest get there in the boat, Jesus says to them, ***"Come and eat."*** Jesus turns the beach into a banquet hall, with His disciples as the guests of honor. And just as He fed the 5,000 in the wilderness with only a little bread and fish, so He here provides bread and fish for His disciples. To eat and have their fill. To feast with Jesus and enjoy their time with Him. With no sense of hurry. Jesus doesn't have to rush off. He is here for them.

And He is here for you, turning this little place in Vienna into a banquet hall, with you as the guests of honor. And so He calls to you, ***Come and eat*** - though on no mere bread and fish do *you* feast, but on the very Body and Blood of your Lord. Not to fill your stomachs, but to fill your hearts and lives with forgiveness, faith, joy, love, hope, and peace. That you not only *know* that your Redeemer lives, but live with Him. Live with Him now in this life, and live with Him forever in His life. And so He fills you with Himself. That your empty be empty no more. That your nothing be nothing no more. That you now live in Him and He in you. A new life. A resurrection life.

A life that starts even now. For after they had all eaten and had their fill, Jesus speaks to Peter. ***Feed my sheep***, He says.

Remember how I said before that we want to prove that *not for nothin'* did Jesus

choose us to be His children? Well, turns out that's true - but in a slightly different way. For while we have nothing in us that is a reason why God would choose us, He doesn't choose us for nothing: He now sends us out to live the new life He has given us, in the places and callings He has given us. For Peter, that was to **Feed my sheep**. Not because Peter was such a great, steadfast guy - we know that he wasn't! But the Jesus who had chosen him and raised him and forgiven him, would now work through him to feed others. Jesus had great plans for Peter, and for the others. And He has great plans for you.

Yes, great plans! And just as Jesus has chosen you and raised you and forgiven you, so now He is using you to bless others. To be a blessing to your children, to your parents, to your employees, to your boss, to your friends and neighbors, to your schoolmates, to your spouse, to all the people He gathers around you and brings across your path every day. And you are. Not because you are so great, but because your Saviour is. Because He never goes fishin', but is always working, always forgiving, always loving, always blessing, always giving. To you, for you, and through you.

It may not always be easy. In Peter's case, it would mean a cross. For some other disciples, it would mean being fed to wild beasts, or burned alive. For some Christians today it means persecution and death in other ways. And even if it doesn't mean those things for you, you may get frustrated or give your life in other, smaller ways. The life of Christ is not always easy. But know that come what may, the life that He gives no one can take away from you.

So maybe there will be times you need to just go fishin'! That's okay. Your Saviour will be with you wherever you go, to raise you and give you life and all that you need. To forgive and refresh you and feed you. For His empty tomb means that He will never leave you empty, but fill you with His life. For Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!] Alleluia!

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.