



Notes for Preaching - Doug Beacham

5th Sunday of Easter (May 10, 2020)

Introduction

For May 10th and 17th, we are going to look at John 21 and the resurrection accounts of Jesus' engagement with the disciples. For May 10, we will examine John 21:1-14, and May 17, we will examine John 21:15-25.

Regarding sources, I'm primarily using Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1970). Rather than extensive footnotes, I will note any quote or direct point as Brown, the page number in parenthesis.

New Testament Texts

John 21:1-3 Context

1. The Gospel records mention appearances of Jesus in Galilee in:
 - a. Matthew 28:16-20 (the Great Commission passage).
 - b. Mark 16:7 where the women at the empty tomb were told to "tell His disciples – and Peter – that He is going before you into Galilee, there you will see Him, as He said to you."
 - c. Luke does not record a Galilee appearance.
 2. John 21:1 I pointed out that this appearance in Galilee is another appearance of Jesus to the disciples. Brown points out that the word "again" (palin) is used 43 times in John (p. 1067). Does the "again" refer back to solely appearances in and around Jerusalem (John 20; Luke 24), or does it refer to additional Galilee appearances or both? John 21:14 mentions
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that this was the “third time” that Jesus showed Himself to the disciples, and in John’s account, it is the third time (based on the two appearances in John 20).

3. 21:1 makes it clear that “Jesus showed Himself again.” The Greek word for “showed” is *phaneroo*. It is used twice in this verse and once again in 21:14. Brown remarks that “it has the general connotation of emergence from obscurity, and for John involves a concrete revelation of the heavenly upon earth” (p. 1067).

4. The listing of the “disciples” in verse 2 is interesting. Notice that they are not called “apostles” by John, as the listing of “the twelve” as apostles occurred in Matthew 10:1-4; Mark 3:14-19; Luke 6:13-16. The names in common were Simon Peter, Thomas (the Twin), and the sons of Zebedee (James and John). The different names are Nathanael of Cana in Galilee and “two others of His disciples.” Nathanael is not named in the Synoptic Gospels and appears only in John 1 and 21 (1:45, 46, 47, 48, 49; 21:2). I don’t think John is trying to make any particular point by John here, other than that Jesus had many people who followed Him as a disciple, and He appeared to them as well as appeared to those He called apostles.

5. This group of seven disciples were together near the Sea of Galilee, and it was night. It really sounds like a group of friends and colleagues who perhaps have been discussing all that has occurred since the resurrection, perhaps praying, and one of them, Simon Peter, said, “I’m going fishing.” The others decided to join Simon Peter and “immediately” got into the boat. Needless to say, the text does not actually tell us what these seven were doing before Peter’s fishing decision. So even my comment is speculation. It could have just as easily been that the seven ran into one another about the same time at the Sea of Galilee.

6. I’ve heard preachers remark that Peter returned to his former occupation out of a sense of failure related to his denial. The text does not say that. Though it should be pointed out the text implies something akin to the occupation dynamic in 21:15, “Do you love Me more than these (fish, fishing)?” But even that is open to interpretation as we will discuss more next week. Peter’s action may be little more than doing something with which he was familiar, or perhaps, taking steps to provide income for his family and business.

7. John 21:3 concludes with the disciples unsuccessful in their fishing trip. Brown observed concerning the night fishing, “Those knowledgeable in Palestinian customs assert

that on the Lake of Galilee night fishing is usually better than day fishing; and fish caught at night could be sold fresh in the morning” (p. 1069). Kenneth Bailey in “Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2008) says essentially the same thing in his remarks about Peter, Jesus, and the episode in Luke 5: “the fish in the Sea of Galilee (and elsewhere) feed at night. In the daytime they hide under rocks” (p. 141).

John 21:4-10 – Key Points

1. John introduced Jesus into this fruitless fishing expedition. Through the night nothing was caught. Though the morning had begun, the light may have been soft as the disciples, who were 100 yards or so from the shore, could recognize the “stranger on the shore.”
2. In John 20, Jesus’ first words were of Shalom, peace. But in this encounter Jesus spoke to them as “children,” (paidion). The word denotes someone who is a little older than a child, more like “boys or girls.” We might in today’s language think of an adult speaking to a group of boys playing baseball, basketball, or football, and saying, “Boys, who is winning?” Like the hypothetical question in the previous sentence, Jesus also asked a question, “Have you any food?” or, have you caught anything?
3. The disciples do not recognize Jesus physically or even in His voice, but they heard the question and replied in the negative with a simple “no.”
4. In reply Jesus told them, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some” (21:6). The relationship to Luke 5:1-11 is striking. In Luke 5 Jesus was in the boat with Simon Peter. After His teaching, Jesus told Peter “launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” Peter’s response was that “we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your Word . . . (5:5).
5. The disciples in John 21 acted on the Word of the Man on the seashore and “now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish” (21:6). It was at that point that “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John) told Peter, “It is the Lord!” (21:7). There is an interesting interplay between John and Peter and continued into the latter part of John 21.
6. Peter, who was likely clothed with a simple loin cloth, put on more clothes and swam to the shore, while the other disciples in the boat dragged the heavy fish net to the shore. One

cannot help but think of Peter getting out of the boat again! This time not to walk on water at the command of the Lord, but in response to his recognition of the Lord on the shore, Peter is doing all he can to get near Jesus.

7. Once everyone is on the shore, they discover that a fire of coals is prepared. That means that probably Jesus started a fire, kept it going until coals for cooking were ready. Notice in 21:9, that fish were already cooking on the coals! Not the fish they had just caught, but fish and bread that Jesus had prepared. It was only then that Jesus asked them to “bring some of the fish which” they had caught (21:10).

John 21:11-14 – Key Points

1. Apparently reaching the shore ahead of the boat, Simon Peter met the boat at the shore and “dragged the net to the land” (21:11). There were 153 large fish in the net, it was not broken.
2. There are numerous opinions about the meaning of 153 fish. Brown on p. 1074 discussed many of them, including the one where there are 153 varieties of fish, and the number represents the totality of people groups in the world, in terms of being reached with the gospel. That view seems to have arisen with the Latin church father Jerome (b. 347 in modern Croatia; d. 419/420 in Bethlehem, city of David), who in his commentary on Ezekiel 47:9, 10, refers to Greek zoologists who recorded 153 varieties of fish (Brown, p. 1074). Brown quotes Augustine that the meaning of the number is “a great mystery” (p. 1074).
3. Since neither Jesus, nor John, make no clear point about the fish, other than,
 - a. It was a large number.
 - b. They were large fish.
 - c. The net was not broken.
 - d. The net could not be pulled into the boat as could be pulled by one man,

e. I suggest that the focus needs to be on what Jesus can do to address and multiply any of our efforts in service to Him.

4. In 21:12 Jesus invited the 7 to join Him at breakfast. We have the meal motif again, a theme that brings Gospel hospitality to the forefront that culminates in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9). On a personal note, I hold that the apostle John wrote the Gospel record by his name, the three letters by his name, and the book of Revelation.

5. The section closes with Jesus serving the 7 the bread and the fish, and the interesting note that the disciples did not even dare to ask, "Who are You?" They knew that it was Jesus as they heard His voice, realized the miracle of the fish, and were physically present with Him on the shore.

Preaching Thoughts

1. If you want to focus more on Luke 5, notice there that there was a second boat with Jesus on the Sea of Galilee (5:7). It took another boat to bring in all the fish. Recently I heard someone speak on this text who remarked, "the harvest doesn't need more laborers, it needs more boats." There was something about that comment that resonated in my spirit, especially as we think about church planting and going into new counties, different parts of large cities, and new countries where we do not have a presence. The studies show that new churches are very effective at reaching a new harvest for Christ. Give us more boats!

2. We are at a time in the COVID-19 pandemic where some areas of the world are starting to think about resuming some regular routine of life, including churches. Perhaps we need to think about our "re-launch" in terms of Peter going back to what he knew – fishing. It took the presence of Jesus to enable the seven's efforts to be multiplied. Our temptation will be to drift back into our old patterns of "doing church." We are comfortable there; we know what to do. But perhaps the Holy Spirit is calling us to be alert to the voice of Jesus speaking to us from heaven's shore.

3. I find the theme of Jesus multiplying things to be interesting along the Sea of Galilee. Remember that the Feeding of the Five Thousand and the Feeding of the Four Thousand occurred near this body of water. Remember the little lad in John 6:9 with the five barley

loaves and two small fish? The word for “lad” in the NKJV is the same word translated “children” in 21:5. There is this dynamic of the presence of Jesus that multiplies five loaves of bread and two fish, and brings about a large catch of fish (Jn 21) in the same general location. Jesus’ presence is also evident on the Day of Pentecost where His name is proclaimed and 3000 come to faith in Him.