

**The Third Sunday of Easter**  
**Grace Church of West Feliciana Parish**  
**Saint Francisville, LA**  
**10 April 2016**

**John 21:1-19**

The gospel today reminds me of my first experience doing door to door evangelism. As part of our Evangelism class we had an assignment where the entire class was divided into groups of two. Each team was then assigned to a particular block of the town where the seminary was located. The format was very simple: we were to knock on the door, we were to identify ourselves as students from the seminary, and we were to ask if there was anything they needed us to pray for. If the opportunity arose we were to speak about the Gospel and we were to invite them to church.

I remember feeling very nervous as we approached the first home. I was visibly uncomfortable because I always resented when Jehovah's Witness and other groups knocked on my door and asked a terrifying question like, "If you died today, are you sure you will go to heaven?" To me these scary tactics never led me to asking any serious question about my faith and never inspired me to go to church. Anyway, we knocked several times on that first door and I was extremely glad that no one opened the door. We knocked on several more doors. My friend's knock was confident, loud, resolute. He was a man on a mission. My knocks were the knocks of someone praying that no one would open the door. House after house no one opened the door. We had gone through half of our block when we found the first human being that morning. She was a very old woman. She smiled at us and said, "It must be door to door evangelism week!" Then she went on to tell us that everyone on that block knew what week it was and that no one would be rude enough to open the door and then close it on our faces. They would just pretend they were not home until the knocking stopped. After much time spent knocking on doors that never opened, we went back to school and prayed for the unchurched.

Peter and six other disciples are back in Galilee and they decide to go fishing. This is perhaps an indication that even after Jesus has appeared to Peter and some of the disciples at least two times, Peter has decided to go back to his former life as a fisherman. You may recall a similar story in Luke 5:1-11. Peter is mending his nets when Jesus asks if he can use the boat. He gets in and begins to preach from it. After a while he asks Peter to go to the deep end cast his nets. Peter says, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." After they did this, they caught so many fish that Peter says, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" Jesus responds to Peter, John and James, "From today on you will fish for

people.” Luke tells us that they left everything and followed Jesus. Now, three years later, they are back fishing. They have been at it all night and caught nothing, but when Jesus directs them to cast on the other side, they catch a large amount of fish.

The similarity between this story and the story narrated at the beginning of their ministry in the Gospel of Luke gives us clues as to the reason for this story. Jesus wants to re-commission his disciples for ministry. They were called to fish for people, what are they doing back to their old ways? As they struggle to bring the large catch to the shore they are reminded that their ministry will never succeed without Jesus. It doesn't matter how many doors they knock on, no one would open for them. Without Jesus the disciples are no more able to catch fish than I was able to get people to open doors for me. Jesus is the real evangelist and we are nothing but his instruments.

This story has great implications for any church. Some times in churches do the same things we have always done, often getting the same old results, but many seldom stop and ask, “Is this what Jesus wants from us?” I like the image that it took a tremendous amount of effort to bring all those fish to the shore. Evangelism is a group effort. It requires the entire church, doing the hard work of bringing others in. But, there is another image here and that is the image of fellowship. The disciples come to the shore and have breakfast with Jesus. It is within this context of fellowship that Jesus commissions his disciples again through Peter. Perhaps the message is clear. You can use hook and bait strategies to fish for fish, but you need the hard work of befriending people, developing relationships with them, and loving them before you are able to bring these people into a saving faith in Jesus of Nazareth. Inviting people in is only part of the job. Once they are in you have to feed them, care for them, disciple them, and love them.

This story today has to do with the dual tasks of evangelism and discipleship. Evangelism is similar to fishing in the sense that an initial human action, such as inviting someone in, is required. Let me use a slightly different illustration: Every large city has a store in which there is nothing but lamps: hundreds and sometimes thousands of lamps. Some are antique, some are new. Some are plain, some are ornate. Some of them unplugged. Some of them are plugged in and show their light. I remember once overhearing a parent at such a store asking a child, “Which lamp do you like best?” To which the little girl answered, "I like best the ones where the light shines out."

The best evangelism happens when others see the light of the Gospel shining through you. When you take the time to befriend people. Most of us don't like talking about our faith. We find this very intimidating and frightening. When you share another person's life and enter into their world you are given natural opportunities to share your faith and to invite others to a faith in Jesus of Nazareth. You are given opportunities to

shine a light of hope and love into the darkness of their lives. Then, inviting them to church will seem a natural thing to do. The truth, my friends, is that I have never met anyone who has come into a proper relationship with Jesus out of fear and intimidation. Most of the people who come to church for the first time come because they were invited by a friend, because they came to visit once and they felt so welcome and so loved that they knew Christ was the center of that Church. There are over 300,000 Christian churches in the United States. Some are antique, some are new. Some are plain, some are ornate. Some are not plugged in, and some of the ones plugged in keep their light mainly to themselves. God likes best the ones where the light shines out.

Today Jesus asks Peter 3 times if he loves him, reversing the three denials of Peter during his trial and passion. These three questions can be asked of us as well: “Do you love me more than the things you own, more than your possessions, your wealth, your profession, your diplomas, your books... Do you love me more than the comforts of your life?” Let us think carefully how we will answer him, my brothers and sisters, because if we say we do he will ask us to feed his sheep. The second question is harder, “Do you love me more than people? More than you love your own family and friends. More than you love being popular and well liked? More than being famous?” If we say we do, Jesus will ask us to tend his lambs. Then he will ask us, “Do you love me more than anyone else? Do you love me with single-minded determination and commitment. Would you die for me?” If we say we do, he will ask us again to tend his sheep.

These three orders to feed and care for others makes it clear that love requires action. It does others no good if we say we love them, but fail to care for them. It helps no one if we say that we are on the side of the poor, but never actually do anything for them. If we say that we love our friends, but never take the time to listen to them, if we let them die in their own isolation and fear and fail to introduce them to Christ. My friends love is action! Love is as love does! Jesus tells us today, “Let your love so shine before others that they will give glory to your father in heaven.”

I pray that today you will agree to be an evangelist and a disciple-maker, primarily through the quality of your life and, when necessary, with your words. Amen!