Text: John 21:1-19

**Introduction**

So I am told that this wall up front that holds up the cross has 153 bricks in it – 17 x 9. And that the number comes from our gospel lesson today – 153 fish. I have no idea what, if anything that number means. That hasn’t stopped readers and commentators throughout time attempting to find something. Jerome asserted there were 153 species of fish, so the fishers of men would catch some of all men. Augustine noted the interesting fact that 1+2+3+4+ all the way to 17 equals 153. The point being something like the church grows by addition. Gregory makes is something of a Catechism lesson. 10 for the 10 commandments plus 7 for the seven spirits of God – a Revelation reference – for the work of the Holy Spirit – the proclamation of the Gospel, so law and Gospel multiplied by 3 – the Trinity – squared, which somehow means perfection. And then there are all kinds of wild gematria or letters equal numbers games, like supposedly the greek word for fish – ICTHYS – would sum up to 153.

Call me crazy. I just think it means 153 fish were caught. Which is a ridiculous number. And hence within the scene itself something of a sign. That all the struggles to discern its true meaning are missing.

**Text**

The story goes something like this. The first thing we should notice is the change of scene. The Sea of Tiberias is The Sea of Galilee. The disciples – 7 of them here – are back in Galilee. And apparently they are just sitting around doing nothing. Maybe they are sitting around waiting for Jesus to come and tell them something. Maybe they are still just taking it in. But the tedium of sitting around gets to Peter and he announces “I am going fishing.” And quickly everyone else jumps up and agrees, “we will go with you.”

In one way you could say this is simply life reasserting itself. Most of us have experienced this. A death in the family or some other event yanks us out of time. There are all kinds of things that must be done. And after they are done we might drift a bit, but eventually ordinary time reasserts itself. We go back to work. We go back to the routine. And this is usually good. Unless the event was supposed to have changed you. When Peter was called he was a fishman. Jesus said if he followed him he would make him a fisher of men. Has everything that Peter gone through and seen just been to return him to the boat fishing on the Sea of Galilee? Has everything that you have seen and heard these days just receded into the past changing nothing?

**Moral**

These disciples go back to fishing of their own idea and what happens? “They caught nothing.”

If we have a calling. If we have something we are supposed to be doing, and instead we are just doing what is familiar because it is comfortable. This is what that often comes to – nothing. We’ve all done this, right? The old Franklin planner method would have you make out the to do list. Things that were part of the calling would be A’s, things that might need to be done to do an A would be B’s. And everything else were C’s. And then the sun comes up and what do you start doing? The C’s. Because you know them. Because you can get them done. Because checking them off makes it feel like you’ve done something. But what have you really done? Nothing. Because that same C will be back on the list tonight. And there are lots of people who spend their lives in safe and familiar C’s.

As the day is breaking and the disciples return with nothing, the risen Jesus appears and asks them, “Children, do you have any fish?” Calling them children is interesting. If 7 burly men who caught nothing all night were coming back not sure “children” is what I’d call out. But I think it simply means the status of their faith. They have a calling. In his first and second appearances he “sent them out as the Father had sent me.” Those mature might have followed his words. But the children don’t know any better. Or are afraid. Or don’t know where to begin.

But the place to begin is always with the word of God. When we do it ourselves, we catch nothing. But Jesus tells them “cast the net on the right side of the boat, you will find some.” And when they do what Jesus says, “they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish.”

These disciples had a calling. They had the word of God. They were to be doing something. Which at this point they were not doing. They could continue their plans and catch nothing. Or they could follow their callings. And catch the blessings of God.

Now we aren’t the apostles. But we do have the word of God. And I’d bet that most of us have some type of calling. And if you don’t want to use that word calling, fine. You have some idea “I should be doing X.” Whether X came about from your private meditation and prayer, or you heard it indirectly, or someone specifically asked you “can you do this” and you immediately knew that “yes, I should do that.” Call it spiritual intuition. Call it hearing the voice of the Shepherd. You know it when you hear it. And you’ve got a choice. Do you want to catch nothing? Or do you want 153 large fish.

**Christology**

But maybe there are things that stand in the way. There usually are. For these disciples there was a minor problem and a major problem. The minor problem was hunger. They’d been out all night and they’d just lugged a massive haul of fish to land and had nothing. Also after those major events you know what happens. You don’t eat. You make it through them based on reserves. And as ordinary time comes back you find out you are famished.

Jesus knows this. And he says to those disciples “come and have breakfast.” Come and have the first meal. Come restore your strength. And this meal is a bit like those earlier miraculous feedings of the 5000 and 4000. Jesus gives them bread and fish. Jesus in his providence certainly gives us everything that we need to support this body and life. But Jesus also invites us to regular spiritual meals – Word and Sacrament. Jesus knows that we need these things. Prayer…songs, hymns and spiritual songs…encouragement from his Word. And he supplies these. “Come have breakfast.” Recognize Christ in your midst.

But maybe there are bigger things than the regular breakfast. Maybe it’s been a long time. Maybe never. Maybe you’ve betrayed the Lord and the calling. That’s where Peter found himself. Maybe he went fishing because he didn’t think that Jesus’ sending really included him. How could it?

But it did. And it does. Not that a deep and sincere repentance is easy. Peter “was grieved.” But it’s was that cathartic type of grief. They type of confrontation where you make a choice exactly who and whose you are. “Simon, do you love me?” If you do, I’ve got a call for you. You aren’t a fisherman anymore, but a fisher of men. And calls aren’t easy. Yours especially. “when you are old, you will stretch out your hands.” Whose are you Simon? Who do you want to be?...”Follow me.”

The grace of Christ covers even the deepest betrayal. Jesus is the friend of sinners. And sometime the medicine is harsh, but it’s because our wound is grievous and needs its.

**Eschatological**

So we are kinda back to those 153 and that wall. These Apostles wouldn’t be found out fishing again. They went about their calling. All but one of them martyrs for it. But following the Word of Jesus, they brought in the biggest catch ever. That net is still being hauled into the shore today. And even through schisms and heresies and long ages that net has not broken. The word is still proclaimed. Christ is risen. Your sins are forgiven. The sacraments are administered. Your baptism now saves you giving you your basic calling as a disciple of Christ.

And ultimately, the exact number will come in. And not a one will be lost. Maybe we won’t be able to count them. Numerous as the stars. But the Father knows the number. 153 large. He’s given these to His son. And they will all be there. They will all be part of that new song in heaven. “Worthy is the Lamb…who made us a kingdom and priests to God, who shall reign on the earth.”

That’s the final calling we all have. To give glory to God. To give him the glory in word and deed and truth. Amen.