

Experiencing The Resurrection Life

John 21:1-14

Sometimes we just need something normal in our lives, and that may have been what Peter had in mind in saying he was going fishing. Perhaps it was a kind of therapy, to once again feel the water moving beneath the boat, to wrap their hands around the ropes of the fishing net, to smell the unique smells of the lake. When things are uncertain in our lives, when life's events make our heads spin, sometimes we just want something familiar, something *comfortable*. We can imagine the other six men almost breathing a sigh of relief, that Peter, the leader among them, would suggest something that they could actually *do!*

But then Jesus appeared on the shore—and everything changed. This was the Resurrected Christ, and just as we do today, the disciples had varying experiences with Him. He came to them—He “revealed Himself” to them—and as we look closer at the story, we realize that the Resurrected Christ reveals Himself to each of us at different levels of our lives. At this early stage of living in a world where death has been conquered, the disciples were still fresh in their experience. This is the third time that Jesus has revealed Himself to them, and they are still a little uncertain as to what is expected of them.

Being individuals, each of them experienced the Risen Christ in a different way, on a different level. The same holds true for us in our day. Each one of us experiences the Resurrection Life differently. In fact, it would not be unusual to say that each of us experiences the Resurrection Life on several different levels at different times in our lives.

1 Sometimes our efforts are fruitless, v. 5.

Yes, even living the Resurrection Life means that our nets sometimes come up empty! There may have been absolutely nothing wrong with the disciples going fishing. But Jesus may have deliberately kept them from catching any fish because He wanted to drive home the truth that He had given them before: “*apart from Me you can do nothing*” (John 15:5). When Jesus called out to them, He said, “*Friends, haven't you any fish?*” That's the NIV rendering, but what Jesus literally said to them was, “*Boys, you haven't caught any fish, have you?*” It was worded in such a way as to suggest that Jesus knew the answer already. He knew that though going fishing was not necessarily the *wrong* thing to do, in this case going fishing was an activity done apart from Him.

Jesus was not saying that we can't even catch fish without His work in our lives, but He is emphasizing the importance of including Him in the details of our lives. This was just a little reminder to them of His claim on them, and especially so now that He was resurrected. Things were going to be totally different from now on!

There may be nothing wrong with the thing we're doing. It's just that we don't always turn to Him for direction. His love for us is so great and so deep that sometimes living the Resurrected Life means that our nets come up empty! Sometimes our best efforts are fruitless because He is reminding us that we need to turn to Him for help and guidance and blessing. He wants us to live constantly with the keen understanding that we need Him in our lives!

What this means is that when we've tried and tried and we see no results for what we've done, we should not become discouraged and doubt God's plan for us. It simply means that perhaps there's a lesson we need to learn, just as the disciples needed to learn something. When our nets come up empty, we may need to ask ourselves some very pointed questions:

What am I doing?

Why am I am doing this?

Is this what God wants me to be doing right now in my life?

What are my long-term goals?

Should I be doing something else?

The lesson may be that God is turning us to Himself in a greater and deeper measure than we've ever experienced before. We may have done everything right, and everything we know to do, yet sometimes He withholds immediate blessings because His desire for us involves something much, much greater.

2 Sometimes our lives abound with blessings, v. 6

When the nets come up empty, it's important for us to be honest about it. In verse five, the disciples' answer to Jesus' question was a very blunt, very sullen, "No." You can almost hear the discouragement in their voices. Pay attention to this. Jesus never once reprimanded them for going fishing. He just took charge of the situation and told them where to find the fish. "*Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.*"

Living the Resurrected Life means, first, that we are obedient to Christ. In this case it was something as simple as throwing the net in the water in the right place, even if they had fished all night and caught nothing. Sometimes it means trying again, even after failure. Sometimes it means making the smallest change, as it did for them. Many times living the Resurrected Life means that we experience a change in our attitude, just as the disciples did. They went from a surly "No" to an abundant catch of large fish, because their attitude changed from discouragement to quick obedience.

Look what happened when they obeyed. Verse six says that "*When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.*" And we read in verse 11, "*It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn.*" This was far more than they could have expected—so many, in fact, that seven professional fisherman could not pull the net in.

It is definitely true that there are amazing blessings that are available to us when we follow the Resurrected Christ. For us, it may not be that we are always successful when we go fishing, or that we are always successful in anything that we do. But it is definitely true that with Christ there are some blessings we can receive only if we follow and obey Him.

For example, Jesus said in Luke 6:38, *“Give, and it will be given to you. [Cast the net on the right side of the boat: give and it will be given to you.] A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”* Jesus told us, *“I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full”* (John 10:10). Paul wrote the Corinthians that *“God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work”* (2Co 9:8). He described our God as One *“who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine”* (Eph. 3:20).

Blessing upon blessing, more than we can imagine! More than we can ask or think! All made possible to us through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

3 Sometimes we are breathless with wonder, v. 7a.

Verse seven tells us that John is the first to realize the man on the shore was Jesus! We can imagine his eyes growing wide with excitement as he grabs Peter’s arm, perhaps twirling him around so he can see, as well. “It is the Lord!” he said, and I hear him saying it with a near-breathless excitement in his voice.

Have you ever had one of those moments when you suddenly are aware of the presence of Christ in your life? You may have been reading your Bible or praying or even privately singing a praise song to the Lord. Or you may not have been. You may have been going for a walk, or mowing the lawn, or yes, even changing a diaper. And suddenly you were aware of a Presence that stripped away all doubts and fears and left nothing but joy and wonder and adoration. You may have been going about your regular routine, when suddenly, there He was! He showed up in a conversation with a perfect stranger. He revealed Himself to you in a baby’s laughter, or an absolutely majestic sunset. A card comes in the mail, an email arrives from an old friend, and you are suddenly blessed with His Presence.

It may have been like Jacob’s experience, seeing the angels of God going up and down a staircase into heaven in a dream. When he awoke, he said, *“Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.”* It may have been similar to David’s experience, watching sheep one clear, moonlit night, when he exclaimed, *“O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!”* (Psalm 8:1). Or it may have been like the centurion at the cross, who exclaimed, *“Surely he was the Son of God!”* (Matthew 27:54).

It may have been riding down the road in your vehicle, or in the quietness of a church service. It could have come to you when you were surrounded by other people in a crowd, or when you were alone in the woods, or in the dark of night. But He came, and when He revealed Himself to you, everything changed. You may not have been literally breathless, but your heart was filled with wonder and praise and adoration as you realized that the great God of Heaven, the King above all kings, was actively involved in the details of your life.

Charles Wesley, one of the co-founders of the Methodist Church, once wrote the words to a hymn that expresses this breathless wonder. The first and last stanzas read:

*Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heaven to earth come down;
Fix in us thy humble dwelling;
All thy faithful mercies crown!
Jesus, Thou art all compassion,
Pure unbounded love Thou art;
Visit us with Thy salvation;
Enter every trembling heart.*

*Finish, then, Thy new creation;
Pure and spotless let us be.
Let us see Thy great salvation
Perfectly restored in Thee;
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before Thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.
--Charles Wesley*

But one of the most important things we learn about living this Resurrection Life is that we don't have to wait until we get to Heaven to begin experiencing this breathless wonder. It can be, and should be, a part of our regular experience with Jesus. We should never lose the ability to be awed by His Presence in our lives whenever and however He reveals Himself to us.

4 Sometimes we are eager to fellowship with Him, v. 7b

When John told Peter, "*It is the Lord!*" the Scriptures say that Peter was so eager to be closer to Jesus that he "*wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water.*" Look a little closer at this with me. In verse six, Jesus told the disciples to "*throw*" their nets into the water. The word is used twice in that one verse. "**Throw** your net on the right side of the boat. When they **threw it**, they were unable to haul the net in." Then in verse seven, when we read that Peter "*jumped into the water*" we find the same word. Literally, Peter **threw** himself into the water. This was not a measured, premeditated, cautious dive into the water. Peter was so eager to be closer to Jesus that he leaped with reckless abandon into the water.

Some might say that Peter was just feeling guilty because he had denied knowing Christ, but he's already seen Jesus twice since the Resurrection. No, I believe this sudden, impetuous action was based on his love for Jesus. I think that is the very reason Jesus took him for a walk down the beach and asked him three times, "*Simon, son of John, do you love me more than*

these?” I believe Jesus recognized the love which motivated Peter to such spontaneity, and rewarded Peter with an opportunity to know that his denials could be forgiven.

When you and I are living the Resurrected Life, we are eager to spend more time with Him. There is not a day that goes by that we are not hungry for fellowship with our Lord. In fact, we will be so hungry for it that we will do whatever we need to do so we can spend time with Him. We will literally “throw” ourselves into the kind of schedule where we will not only have the time to meet with Him regularly, but where we find it difficult to tear ourselves away from those precious times we spend with Him, and eagerly look forward to the next time.

5 Sometimes we muddle through the routine of responsibility, vv. 8, 11

When we are honest with ourselves, we have to admit that there are hours, days, even seasons, of our lives when we feel that we are just muddling through life. We know the Resurrected Christ, and we love Him and do our very best to serve Him. But sometimes the routine of life seems to be just too *much* of a routine—do you know what I mean? The things on the to-do list are just too habitual, too mundane, too ordinary, too dull, too predictable.

Verse eight tells us that while Peter was swimming the hundred yards or so to the shore to be closer to Jesus, that *“the other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish.”* I do not mean to imply that the other disciples did not love Jesus, or want to be with Him. But they found themselves with a net full of fish, and they could not ignore that. This was a blessing given to them by God, and they must see to it. There are plenty of times in our lives, even in the Presence of the Resurrected Christ, that we must tow the net full of fish.

Later, as the disciples made it to shore, they found *“a charcoal fire there, with fish lying on it, and bread.”* Then Jesus told them, *“Bring some of the fish you’ve just caught.”* Look at what Peter did. There were so many fish, and the net was so heavy, that the other disciples were not able to pull it into the boat. Yet in verse eleven, we read that *“Simon Peter got up and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish—153 of them.”* Tradition says that Peter was a very big man, and there may be some truth to that. Peter was obviously a very strong man, that he could do what the other six could not!

But the point is bigger than that. Even Peter, as eager as he was to be with Jesus, still recognized that there was a responsibility here that needed his attention. After all, he was the one who had first suggested they go fishing in the first place. The Resurrected Christ was indeed there, but there was a job to do.

There are times, as we live our Resurrection Life, that we must see to the responsibilities that God places in front of us. Those tasks may not be glorious. They may not place us in the

spotlight or the center of attention. We may not even receive credit or recognition for them. But they come to us as an abundant blessing from the Hand of God, and we must at times drag the nets behind us. And as much as we would much rather sit by the fire and worship with undiluted adoration for our Risen Savior, there are still times in our lives when we have responsibilities that take us away from the fire, away from the companionship with Christ, away from the fellowship with other believers, and see to the everyday jobs God has for us.

We live in a world that shuns responsibility, as if it is a dirty thing. Every time I see a scrap of paper blowing along the ground, I think that whoever dropped that garbage on the ground needs to learn some responsibility. “Fiscal responsibility” seems to be a phrase being tossed around a lot these days, but not too many seem to know what that means. There are responsibilities in our jobs and in our homes and in our churches. There are responsibilities that people take on when they move to a new home, or get married or have children.

How much more so is it when we receive the Risen Christ into our lives and begin to follow Him! How much more so is it when we are living the Resurrection Life ourselves! We know deep inside us that we cannot be flippant about our commission. There are responsibilities we have as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, things that we have been commanded to do and that we must do.

I was talking to a pastor friend the other day, who teaches a small seminary extension class. These are men and women who either are now or will be serving a church in some paid staff position. They were discussing in their class the issue of the church reaching out to people who are different from those in the church. My friend warned the class of a very sobering truth: that some of them would be fired from their churches if they actually did reach out to others, the way Jesus taught and commanded.

One of the students is a pastor. He told the class that some in his church were actually reaching out to others who were different—socially, ethnically, economically. And some of those people began to attend his church. But then some of the more influential church members began to be “concerned” because of these people who were attending “their” church. So the pastor said, “Well, folks, this is what The Great Commission says that we are to do.” He was saying to them, “This is our mission. This is our responsibility.” He received such opposition to the whole idea that he put The Great Commission to a vote in his church! Do we support it or not? And that sounds a little comical to us.

But then this pastor told his stunned classmates that the church actually voted against The Great Commission! Can you imagine? I heard my friend telling this and I just shook my head in disbelief. But then I realized something: there are churches who call themselves “Christian” all across our great land who have already voted against The Great Commission by their inactivity,

by their apathy, by their nonchalant attitude toward anything spiritual. There are people who call themselves “Christian” around the world, starting right here in our own community, who have already voted against The Great Commission by their don’t-care attitude regarding our responsibilities for service in the Kingdom of God.

But those churches and those individuals who are living the Resurrection Life are busy about discovering and fulfilling the tasks that our great God and King has given us! They are discovering that fulfilling our responsibility to be the church, wherever they are and of whatever size they are, is what they’re about. They may go through spells of time when their work is fruitless, when their nets are empty. They go through periods when their lives abound with blessings, and when God is moving among them with such force and power that they are breathless with wonder. As a result, many times we are just eager to follow Him and be with Him and fellowship with Him.

But there are also seasons when we just follow Him through the routine, when obeying Him and dragging our nets behind us is not only the best we can do, but it is the only thing we are commanded to do at the time.

Your experience of the Risen Christ, at any given moment of your life, may be different than mine, or even what it was just yesterday. But take heart! Jesus has revealed Himself to us! He comes to us! He fellowships with us! He commissions us!

Now go! Live the Resurrection Life!