

JESUS REVEALED

John 21:1-14

Third Sunday of Easter (Series C)

May 1, 2022

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

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The gospel lesson for the Third Sunday of Easter comes from *The Gospel According to John*, chapter 21, verses 1 through 14. In this gospel lesson, Jesus again reveals himself to his disciples. He continues to prove that he really did rise from the dead, and he really is the Son of God. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From John 21, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

¹ After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. ² Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. ³ Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴ Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered him, "No." ⁶ He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. ⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. ⁸ The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.

⁹ When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." ¹¹ So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Jesus is alive. This is not a myth. This is not a legend. This is what actually happened. Sometimes we have trouble believing this. The problem is not with Jesus, and the problem is not with his Gospel. The problem is with us. We live in a world of death, and so we have trouble believing life.

John marks this as the third time that Jesus revealed himself to his disciples. It's interesting that John keeps track of this and counts appearances the way he does.

JESUS REVEALED (John 21:1-14)

We read about the first two last week. We didn't consider them during the sermon, but we heard about them in the gospel lesson, and we talked about them in the adult Sunday school class. They directly precede this reading, back in John 20. The first one occurs on the evening after Jesus' resurrection. It was that first Sunday night, even though they didn't call it "Sunday;" they just called it "the first day of the week." The disciples were all together, except for Thomas. The doors were locked, because they feared that the same people who had killed Jesus might try to kill them too. They had heard reports of Jesus' resurrection, and some of the disciples who had seen Jesus were even there with them, but most of them, and especially the eleven, did not yet believe it to be true. The reports of Jesus' resurrection actually caused them to fear, because, if the tomb was empty, word of that would have gotten back to the authorities, and perhaps the authorities would think the disciples had stolen Jesus' body in order to fake his resurrection. So they thought those authorities would come after them for something they didn't do.

But then Jesus passes through the locked door and appears to them. He showed them his hands and his side, the places where the nails and spear had pierced his flesh. And he declares peace to them, because he has made peace by the blood of the cross (Col. 1:20). The wounds are a reminder of that. That's the first appearance.

The second appearance occurred eight days later. The way we count, we would call it seven days, but they counted both the day at the beginning and the day at the end. So counting Sunday through Sunday, they call it eight days. Apparently, for a whole week, they didn't see Jesus again. But now they were gathered in the same place. This time Thomas was with them, and Jesus appeared to them again in the same way. He showed them his hands and his side, and he especially revealed himself to Thomas, because Thomas did not believe the other disciples when they told him about it the week before. That's the second appearance.

And John marks the third as this appearance beside the sea. It's interesting that John specifically counts these three appearances. We know there were at least a couple others. Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene and a few other women early on Easter morning (20:11-18; Matt. 28:9-10). He also appeared to two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). That also occurred on Easter Sunday, before his appearance to the larger group of disciples in the locked room. And John knows about these other appearances. He even recorded one of them in his gospel. But he gives a special emphasis to the ones where he appears to several of the disciples together.

I think he wants to emphasize the togetherness of Christians. Jesus comes to his disciples when they are gathered together. And at least two of the three appearances were on Sundays. Sunday is the day of Jesus' resurrection, and so it became the day when Christians began to gather together for worship. It doesn't have to be a Sunday, but whenever Jesus' disciples gather together, there he is in the midst of them. And that's really the point. Elsewhere Jesus says, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Matt. 18:20). We should expect that when we gather together to hear Jesus' Word, and especially with the Lord's Supper, that Jesus is present among us. That's what he promises. This is why we don't do private communion unless someone is sick or homebound. And we certainly don't do it alone. It's a congregational thing. When we are gathered together around Jesus' Word and Sacraments, we are the body of Christ, and he is here among us. And we see a little glimpse of this in Jesus' appearances to his disciples. He doesn't come to them privately. But he comes when they are gathered together.

Now this passage isn't really the strongest evidence for this. We have other passages that prove that the congregation is the body of Christ and that Jesus comes to us when we are

gathered together in his name. So this passage isn't the proof of the doctrine. If we make this passage the proof, it will look like flimsy evidence. But it's one of those things where, since we have the evidence from other passages, we look at Jesus' appearances to his disciples, and we see a little glimpse of it here. Jesus comes to us when we are together.

The biggest thing this passage teaches us is that Jesus is alive. This, again, is not something new. We heard it last week, the week before that, and hopefully a whole bunch of other times. It's also not something new for the disciples. They saw him on the evening of his resurrection. And they saw him the same way a week later. Now they see him again beside the Sea of Galilee. John calls it the Sea of Tiberius here. That was another name for it, but the most common name for it is the Sea of Galilee. Jesus appears to them again.

He proves to them that he is alive. This is something we need to hear over and over again, and it was something that the disciples needed to see over and over again. That's because this is such an unbelievable thing. And when I say this is unbelievable, I don't mean that in the sense that it's just really, really great. I'm trying to train myself to not use the word "unbelievable" unless I actually mean that something cannot be believed. The resurrection of Jesus is so impossible that it cannot be believed. And yet, we do believe it. And the disciples believed it. That's because it really happened, and Jesus proved himself over and over again. It was unbelievable. The disciples did not have the ability to believe it. When they were told about it, they did not believe it. But then they did believe it because they saw Jesus. And since his resurrection is so unbelievable, he appears to them over and over again. Suppose he appears to them just once, and then never again. That wouldn't change the fact that it happened, but they might start to doubt themselves if they only saw him once. Was it a dream? Was it an imposter? Did it really happen? Even though it actually happened, it is so unbelievable that doubts can creep in. So Jesus appears to them again ... and again ... and again.

And this matters for us too. We believe the resurrection of Jesus on the basis of their testimony. If they testify that it happened only once, it would not change the fact that it happened, but it might be harder for us to believe. So Jesus appeared to them on multiple occasions, and in different places, and doing different things. We can look at that and say, "Okay. Even though it seems so unbelievable, there are actually good reasons to believe this actually happened."

Jesus appeared to his disciples over and over and over again, because he is actually alive, and he did not want them to doubt, and he does not want us to doubt. The resurrection proves that Jesus is God. And it proves that Jesus took away our sins. And that's the biggest thing we learn in this passage. It's further confirmation that Jesus is alive. He rose from the dead. He is the Son of God. And he is our Savior.

And there's more to it than that. John emphasizes the specific way in which Jesus revealed himself. In this appearance, Jesus does more than simply show up, let himself be seen, and speak words of comfort. He performs a miracle. This is further proof that it's not an imposter, for only Jesus could do something like this.

Seven of the disciples are fishing. For at least some of them, including Peter, James, and John, this was their trade. So they go fishing. They fished all night. I assume fishing was better at night. I wouldn't know, because I prefer sleeping. But the disciples fished all night, and they caught nothing. Then a person, they don't know who yet, because he was about a hundred yards away, talks to them from the shore, "**Children, do you have any fish?**" (21:5). Jesus knew they

didn't have any fish, but he wants them to acknowledge it. Then he says, “**Cast your nets on the right side of the boat, and you will find some**” (21:6). Apparently they were fishing on the wrong side. Not really. Jesus means “right” as opposed to “left.” And the right side of the boat was only a few feet away from the left side. The amount of fish isn't going to differ that much from one side to the other. But they listen to this strange man, and their net is filled with so many fish that they can't haul it in. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved—that's John's way of identifying himself in his gospel—realized that the strange man on the shore is Jesus. This is how Jesus revealed himself to the disciples.

If you think this story sounds a little familiar, that's because it is. It's similar to what happened in Luke 5, when Jesus first called Peter, James, and John to come and follow him. Jesus is reenacting the same miracle, and this is how he reveals himself to his disciples the third time. They remember what he did when he first called them, and they recognize Jesus by his works.

There are a few differences, though. In the first instance, the one in Luke 5, the nets began to break (5:6), but this time, the nets were not torn, and John makes a point of mentioning this (21:11). I think the point of this is that it's an indication that the resurrection of Jesus ushers in a new era. In the new creation, which we will enter through Jesus' resurrection, things don't break. Sin is absent from the new creation, and it functions as God intends. Things hold together.

Another difference is Peter's reaction. In Luke 5, when Peter witnessed the miracle, he came to the conclusion that Jesus is God. And this is the right conclusion, but it terrified him, so he pleaded for Jesus to depart from him, for he is a sinful man (5:8). But here, he races for Jesus in reckless sort of way. He throws himself into the sea, leaving the others to deal with all the fish, and he swims to shore. It's the complete opposite. Instead of wishing Jesus as far away as possible, he races toward Jesus. Over the last few years, he has learned the character of Jesus and, most especially, Jesus died for the sin that once separated Peter from himself. Since the death and resurrection of Jesus, everything is different. So those are the big differences.

The similarities are important too. The haul of fish reminds the disciples that they will catch men. That was Jesus' way of telling them that they would make more disciples. And this would happen by Jesus' power, not their own. At the power of Jesus' word, their nets were filled with fish. And at the power of Jesus' word, they would also catch men. It taught them, and it continues to teach the Church, that our power is not our own attractiveness, creativity, or authenticity. It is Jesus' Word. And when the disciples get to the shore, they see that Jesus didn't even need their fish. He already has some fish, and he's already cooked breakfast for them. As he calls them to serve him, he will also feed them.

One of the curious things about this passage is John's statement that “none of the disciples dared ask him, ‘Who are you?’ They knew it was the Lord” (21:12). It kind of makes us pause and think, *Why would they even think of asking him that? Don't they recognize him?* So some have suggested that there must have been something different about Jesus' appearance. Perhaps he looked different after his resurrection. Or maybe he prevented their eyes from recognizing him, like those two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Those are both possible. But John doesn't say anything like that.

It could also be that there wasn't anything different about Jesus; he looked exactly like he normally would, but John means that they are becoming more confident that Jesus really did rise from the dead. Before he had to show them his hands and his side in order for them to see that it was really him. That's because the resurrection of Jesus is just so unbelievable. But now that

JESUS REVEALED (John 21:1-14)

they have not only seen him, but also witnessed this miracle of fish, they wouldn't even dare to question him. They know it is him, not an imposter, and not their imaginations. It is the Lord.

Jesus is alive. This is not a myth. This is not a legend. This is what actually happened. Sometimes we have trouble believing this. But the problem is not with Jesus, and the problem is not with his Gospel. The problem is with us. We live in a world of death, and so we have trouble believing life. When life, and I mean real life, the resurrection kind of life, when life comes along, it's so unbelievable. But it's true, and we have this life in Jesus. He was crucified for your sin. He has risen from the dead. And he gives this new life to all who trust in him.

Even though we find it difficult, or even impossible to believe, the Holy Spirit gives us the faith we need. He reveals Jesus to us through his holy Word. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.