

## A FISHING TRIP TO REMEMBER

A man showed up at church with his ears painfully blistered. After the service, his concerned pastor asked, "What in the world happened to you?" The man replied, "I was lying on the couch yesterday afternoon watching a ball game and my wife was ironing nearby. I was totally engrossed in the game when she left the room, leaving the iron near the phone. The phone rang and keeping my eyes glued to the television, I grabbed the hot iron and put it to my ear."

"So how did the other ear get burned?" The pastor asked. "Well, I had no more than hung up and the guy called again." Now there is a man who was focused. He was so caught up in watching the game; he didn't know what he was doing.

In our lesson for today the disciples of Jesus have lost their focus. They are confused and weary. They need a break. They have been through so much. They had seen their Master crucified. They had invested everything they had into following him. Including three years of their lives. When they saw him nailed between two thieves, it was as if everything they had worked for was futile and without meaning. Then the women had gone to the tomb and found the stone rolled away and the body gone. It was then they discovered that their Master was alive. Now each of them had seen him with their own eyes. Still, it was a bit too much for them to deal with mentally and emotionally. They wanted to believe, but it was like they were in a dream.

The disciples were still trying to sort all of this out when Simon Peter said, "Let's go fishing." And they all agreed. An evening in their boat would help them clear their heads and get focused once again. It sounded like the perfect remedy for their stressed out souls. They grabbed their nets, untied their boat and launched out. They fished all night, but without any luck. That happens to fishermen sometimes, doesn't it?

Just as the day was breaking and they were ready to call it a night, they saw a stranger on the beach. "Having any luck?" he called out to them. "Afraid not," they called back. "Cast the net on the other side of the boat," the stranger replied, "and you will find some." And they did, and this time their net was teeming with fish. And the disciple John turned to Simon Peter and said, "It is the Lord." Who else could it be? Who else has dominion over both land and sea? Of course, it is the Lord. Always impulsive, Simon Peter jumped into the water and headed toward shore, while the more reserved disciples steered the boat on in.

It was now time for Jesus to confront his disciples about what lay ahead. That is why he was interrupting their fishing trip. It was time for them to come to grips with what he needed them to do. He had given them time to understand some of the mind boggling experiences they had been through, but now it was time to get on with the work to which he had called them. They wanted to retreat to their nets, but he had bigger

things in mind. Sometimes Christ comes to us and confronts us in order to pull us from one dimension of life to a more important one.

James Baxter tells a most story about a man in Australia who decided that life was too hard for him to bear. However, he ruled out suicide. Instead, he bought a large corrugated iron tank and furnished it simply with the necessities of life. He hung a crucifix on the wall to remind him of the Lord and to help him pray. There he lived a blameless, solitary life, but with one great hardship. Every morning and evening volleys of bullets would rip through the walls of his tank. He learned to lie on the floor to avoid being shot. Still the bullets ricocheted off the corrugated iron and the man sustained several wounds. The walls were pierced with many holes that let in the wind and the daylight and some water when the weather was wet. As he plugged up the holes, he cursed the unknown marksman.

Then, slowly he began to use the bullet holes for positive purposes. He would gaze out through one hole or another and watch the people passing by, the children flying kites, the clouds in the sky, the flights of birds, flowers in bloom, and the rising of the moon. In observing these things he would forget himself. The day came when the tank rusted and finally fell to pieces. He walked out of it with little regret. There was a man with a rifle standing outside. The man from the tank said, "I suppose you will kill me now. But before you do, I would like to know one thing. Why have you been persecuting me? Why are you my enemy, when have I done you any harm?"

The other man laid the rifle down and smiled at him. "I am not your enemy." And the man from the tank saw that there were scars on the other man's hands and feet, and these scars were shining like the sun.

Now I hope you don't get hung up on the thought of Jesus shooting a gun. It's after all just a story. Christ comes to confront us when we would shrink back from our responsibilities. Christ comes to confront us when we would sulk in the shadows rather than walk in the bright sunshine of his service. The disciples simply weren't to go back to their boat, but Jesus comes to them. He confronts them. Their ministry is not over. Indeed, it is just beginning. Christ offers them a challenge that will change their lives.

The boat has been pulled up on shore. They're sitting around a fire. The disciples recognize their risen Lord, but still they are disconcerted by the recent chain of events. While they are lost in their thoughts the resurrected Christ takes some bread and breaks it and gives it to them. Then also the fish. Then he turns to Simon Peter and asks one of the most famous questions in the Scripture, "Simon Peter, do you love me?" three times Christ asks Simon Peter this question, once for each time Peter denied him. "Lord, you know I love you," Peter replies. And after each reply, Jesus instructs Peter to feed his lambs and then his sheep. This is Christ's way of focusing Peter on his real mission in the world. Christ was asking them to forget themselves and to center their lives in ministry to others. That is a challenge that Jesus is still offering his disciples today.

Sociologist and evangelist Tony Campolo once spoke to a group and asked this question, “Is it a sin to own a BMW?” Then he added, “If Jesus had forty thousand dollars, would he buy a BMW or use that to feed or house the needy in the Third World?” Wow, that’s a tough question. That’s the kind of question we would prefer not to even think about. It is a challenging question, even a disturbing one. One woman, however, was so struck by Campolo’s talk that she wrote his ministry a check for the same amount that she paid for her new custom drapes. Her gift built three houses in Haiti.

It is so easy in our affluent society for us to forget who we are and what Christ has called us to be. It is so easy for us to become so preoccupied with our work, with our family, with our own needs that we forget our essential call to feed Christ’s sheep. There are needy people all around us. Needy for things but also needy for love and for a word of encouragement. Most of all, needy to know that God loves them. Who will share Christ’s love with them if we don’t? Jesus confronts his disciples and he challenges them, just like he challenges you and me, to minister to his lambs and sheep.

Then Jesus does one thing more. He gives his disciples a call. It was the same call he gave them at the beginning of their discipleship. Do you know what that call was? “FOLLOW ME.” This is his final instruction for them before he leaves them. “Follow me.” He is not sending them out to a hostile world alone. He goes ahead of them. Like a commander leading his troops into battle. Like an explorer leading his party into the unknown. He takes the first step, and those who would be his followers come after. That is what gives Christian living its radiance and joy.

Don Hawkins in his book, NEVER GIVE UP, tells about a most unusual man with a somewhat unusual name Hilary. Hilary is the president of a successful company and the author of several best-selling books. During one phase of his life, though, Hilary was broke. He was despondent and without direction. During one five-year stretch he tried seventeen different businesses, most of which were unsuccessful. With a young wife and a newborn baby to care for, Hilary wasn’t able to pay the \$64 maternity cost. He had to go out and make some sales just to get his first baby out of the hospital! Then Hilary met an individual named P.C. Merrell. Merrell told him, “If you just believed in yourself and went to work on a regular schedule, incredible things would begin to happen.” P.C. Merrell so motivated Hilary to believe in himself and his ability to sell, that in one year Hilary went from an abject failure without confidence to finish number two out of 7,000 salesmen. The following year he finished at the top, setting records that stand to this day, over forty years later.

During the weekend of July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1972, Hilary and his wife invited two ladies to spend the holiday weekend with them at their home in Dallas. They were a friend named Ann Anderson and a woman named “Sister Jesse,” whom they had met at a convention in Nashville, Tennessee. As a result of that weekend he spent listening to these two unlikely people, Hilary came to trust Jesus Christ as his personal Savior. In his own words, “As a result of that weekend’s experiences, I sold out lock, stock, and barrel to Jesus Christ.”

Through these influences, Hilary was motivated to write two books that bear his more familiar name. The first, published in 1974, described the hope he regained in business. The second explained the eternal and confident hope he obtained by becoming a Christian. Those books, SEE YOU AT THE TOP and CONFESSIONS OF A HAPPY CHRISTIAN, are among a number authored by a man who is far better known to millions of people around the world as Zig Ziglar.

Zig Ziglar discovered what millions of people before him discovered. Life has no meaning, no purpose, and no real passion, if you try to go it alone. The risen Christ comes to each of us to confront us with how we are living our lives, to challenge us to focus not on our own needs but on the needs of others, and finally to say to us what he said to those disciples two thousand years ago: "FOLLOW ME." Will you heed his summons? Will you sell out lock, stock, and barrel to follow the risen Christ? He comes to us to confront, to challenge and call us to discipleship today. Will you heed his call?