

Our Mission is Fishin'

John 21:1-19

INTRODUCTION

According to data gathered and published prior to the pandemic by Church Growth, Inc., on average 41% of the population in every county in the United States is unreached by any Christian church or organization.

- These unreached people have no form of religious training or Biblical orientation. And they acknowledge they know nothing or very little about Jesus, the church, or the Christian faith.
- That number is staggering, but it pales in comparison to this number:
 - In Central Ohio, an area that includes our own Clark County Ohio, nearly 75% of the population is unreached. Three out of every four people.
 - The only region of the country with a greater unreached population than where we live is the state of California.

Perhaps that immediately raises a couple of thoughts in your my mind. Like:

1. Everybody I know goes to church. Response? Your pool of friends is pretty limited. You are living a very sheltered life.
2. Why would expect any of these people to walk into our church? Response? Gone are the days when the life of a community revolved around the church. Gone are the days when a church could open its doors and the watch the unchurched walk in.

We have just completed Lent, a seven week reminder that Jesus came to a world that knew nothing about Him – a world very much like our own. He came because people needed to know about Him and they needed to be able to put their trust in Him for their salvation.

Jesus Himself offered that truth as His own personal life Mission Statement:

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. (Luke 19:10)

The mission of Jesus was clear. The purpose of Easter is clear. And yet 75% of our neighbors are unreached, 41% nationally. Somewhere along the way the church in America has evidently lost sight of its mission.

- It may have taken the church in America 200 years to get to this point.
- It only took the disciples a couple of weeks.

That is what Jesus has to address in today's Gospel text. Let me shape what He says in four questions:

QUESTION #1: THE "NOW WHAT" QUESTION

As in: "Well, that's over. NOW WHAT?"

For the disciples, all of the highs and lows of Holy Week were over. No more trials. No more crucifixions. No more empty tombs.

- They had seen the resurrected Jesus.
- They heard Him speak peace into their fears.
- They no longer felt the need to hide behind locked doors for fear of the Jewish leaders.
- They now had within them a sense that the story of Jesus was over.
- They had just spent three marvelous years in the presence of the greatest teacher they had ever heard.
- They saw miracles they never imagined.
- But here in John 21, it felt like it was over. It was a great run. But it's done.
 - Now you and I know that Pentecost had not happened yet. Neither had the Ascension. There was more to come. But in this chapter, they didn't know that. Not yet.

So when they came out of their hiding places, their question was a simple one: NOW WHAT? What do you do when you don't know what to do next? You do that thing that feels familiar. You do what you used to do.

Look at verses 2-3:

Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." (John 21:2-3)

Churches do the same thing. They run the same programs and hold the same events, even when they no longer have the same impact simply because it is familiar.

QUESTION #2: THE "DO WHAT" QUESTION

As in ... "You want me to DO WHAT?" Look at verses 4-6:

Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. (John 21:4-6)

This is my favorite part of the story. I am a people watcher. I love to sit and watch the expressions on the faces of people when something different is thrown their way.

- These disciples were professional fishermen! At least three of them owned their own fishing businesses before they started to follow Jesus! They may not know what to do in this post-resurrection moment, but they knew how to fish! Nobody needed to teach them how to fish.
- And now this unknown man on the beach is telling them what they are doing is wrong. Of course, He rubs it in first: Did you catch anything?
- Oh I would have loved to have seen the expressions of the disciples.

God delights in putting His people into DO WHAT situations.

- Naaman the leper: *If you want to be cured of your leprosy, dip yourself in the scummy water of the Jordan River.* “You want me to DO WHAT?”
- Moses: *I want you to go confront Pharaoh and free my people from slavery.* “You want me to DO WHAT?”

You see the issue for these disciples wasn't a lack of fish. The sea was full of fish. The issue was ... Would they be willing to do what Jesus asked them to do in order to catch those fish? You want me to DO WHAT?

And that's the issue for us, too. Jesus calls out: *Hey church, build relationships with the 75% of your neighbors who have never heard about me. Tell them I love them.* “You want us to DO WHAT?”

QUESTION #3: THE “KNOW WHAT” QUESTION

As in ... “You KNOW WHAT?”

There are two KNOW WHAT moments in this text. The first is inferred:

But that night they caught nothing. (John 21:3)

KNOW WHAT? What we are doing isn't working. The sea is filled with fish, but we are not catching any.

The second KNOW WHAT moment is a little more obvious. See verse 7:

Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” (John 21:7)

KNOW WHAT? God is calling us to do something different. It is not some random stranger on the shore. It is God.

I went to high school in Indiana during the heyday of Bobby Knight and Indiana Hoosier basketball. Coach Knight had a very combative and abrasive style, and not everyone was willing to play for him. So a reporter asked him once: “How long do you intend to continue coaching with this style?” Knight responded,

As long as it works. (Coach Bobby Knight)

When it stops working, you do something else. For the disciples, when what they had always done stopped working, they listened to the voice of Jesus and did something else.

QUESTION #4: THE “SO WHAT” QUESTION

As in ... SO WHAT happened? Here is how John described it:

When they (cast their nets on the right side), they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish... (They) dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. (John 21:6, 11)

They started to fish where the fish were. And they did, they started to catch fish.

But before they could catch them, they first had to go where the fish were.

For several summers now, our church has emphasized the need to “Go” to where the fish are... to not wait for the fish to come to us, but to fish where the fish are. We are going to do that again this year, and we want you to join us as we go.

- We will have a presence again in the Memorial Day parade. We will need walkers to help hand out candy and information about the church. We will need people on the float. We are supposed to hear the specific details from parade organizers this coming week, so stay tuned.
- We will be at the Clark County Fair, talking about Jesus and about our church. We will be registering kids for VBS, offering a cool place to rest and get a drink of water, and more. We need you to help man the booth. More coming in June about that.
- And something new this year. We are joining forces with more than 25 other congregations across our city for a weeklong emphasis on sharing the gospel and building discipleship relationship with those who want to know Jesus. Watch this video.

PLAY VIDEO

- You can join us now as we pray for revival
- Preview dates: June 26 and July 17
- Launch on Friday, August 5 through Saturday August 13
- Training is given.

Amen.