

30 July 2023

## Cast Your Nets

Dear Sisters and Elders,

In John chapter 21, we read about one of the key experiences the Apostles had with Jesus following his resurrection. Prior to this, their most recent experience with Him had been when the Apostles were gathered and Jesus told Thomas to *“behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side, and be not faithless, but believing.”* (John 20:27)

We don’t know how much time elapsed before this next event, but it was enough that seven of the Apostles, led by Peter, despite having spent three years with Him in His ministry, and having seen and witnessed the risen Lord, returned to that which they knew best: Fishing. In John 21:3, we read that they entered a boat and caught nothing all night long. When the morning came, they saw a man on the shore. It was Jesus, but they knew it not (vs 4). The man called out to them, *“Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No.”* The word translated as “children” is the Greek word, *“παιδιά”* (tsā’via) meaning “young people” or “lads”. Jesus wanted to keep his identity from them for a bit longer, and so he used this term which would have indicated less familiarity. This was a term used as if a stranger seeking to purchase fish. (Pulpit Commentary – Biblehub.com) *“And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find.”* The Apostles cast the net to the right side of the ship and *“now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes”*.

Immediately, John knew that it was the Lord. As soon as John spoke it, Peter jumped out of the boat, into the water, and made his way to the shore. Verse 8 says the rest of the disciples came in the ship as they were only about 100 meters (300 feet) from the land. They pulled the net filled with fish behind the boat and came to Jesus. There they saw a fire of coals with fish already laid thereon, and bread also. Jesus asked them to bring the fish they had caught, so they went and pulled it completely out of the water and made mention that though the nets were full, they did not break (v 11).

I think there are four lessons we can learn from this powerful story recorded only in the gospel of John.

- 1) The Apostles seem to have lost their focus after their last experience with Jesus recorded in John 20. How or why they lost focus we do not know. Perhaps they were bored and not sure what to do. I love Elder Holland’s explanation of this event in his October 2012 conference talk titled “The First Great Commandment”.

*“In effect, Peter said to his associates: ‘Brethren, it has been a glorious three years. None of us could have imagined such a few short months ago the miracles we have seen and the divinity we have enjoyed. We have talked with, prayed with, and labored with the very Son of God Himself. We have walked with Him and wept with Him, and on the night of that horrible ending, no one wept more bitterly than I. But that is over. He has finished His work, and He has risen from the tomb. He has worked out His salvation and ours. So you ask, ‘What do we do now?’ I don’t know more to tell you than to return to your former life, rejoicing. I intend to ‘go a fishing.’ And at least six of the ten other remaining Apostles said in agreement, ‘We also go with thee.’ John, who was one of them, writes, ‘They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately.’”*

- 2) What better way to refocus these good men than having them relive an experience they had had 3 years earlier with him? This is recorded in Luke 5:4-10 and resulted in the calling of the very first disciples: Peter, James, and John. In verses 5-6 we read, *“And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake.”* Twice the Savior gave instructions to these men about where to fish. Twice the result was a catch of *“a great multitude of fishes”*. It is interesting to note that the first time the net began to break, but the second time it held. Perhaps there are some subtle messages to these men and to us. Here are some possibilities.
- a. In the first instance, Jesus wanted these men to know that He was (and is) a God of abundance. And while these three had done very well as fishermen, it would be nothing compared to what he was about to offer them as disciples.
  - b. It was (and is) easy to get caught up in the things of the world, but Jesus was there to free them from the nets of worldly pursuits. Just as these fish were breaking their nets, His message would free them and all who listened to it from worldly nets and cares.
  - c. The second time the nets held. The resurrection had occurred, the Apostles had received the commission to go forth into all the world and preach the gospel and now the message was that as they gathered the children of Israel, the nets would hold. The doctrine was established, the church was organized, and the nets, now representing Christ’s gospel would not break.
- 3) It is interesting that in this latest event, the men counted the fishes. There were 153. A very good catch! Perhaps the message to us is that it is important to count the “fish” that we are gathering in our efforts to establish Zion. The Church goes to a great deal of effort to make sure that every single person that is baptized has a membership record that follows them throughout their life. Setting goals and achieving them is part of casting our nets. Numbers matter because they represent the sons and daughters of God who are progressing towards the making of eternal covenants.
- 4) Lastly, the Lord always knows where the fish are! In both events, the Lord told them where to cast their nets, they followed his direction, and the result was a significant catch. Today the Lord still knows where the “fish” are for which we are looking. We call them the Elect of God. Do we hear His voice and then immediately cast our nets in that direction? In the second event, he told them to let their nets down on the RIGHT side of the boat. Perhaps symbolic of His authority of being on the RIGHT hand of the Father - and ours as His messengers. Perhaps to remind them (and us) to always choose the right.

May we easily recognize the Lord’s hand in our work. And may we easily recognize Him. May we cast our nets immediately wherever He tells us to cast them. May we keep good and proper records of our work. May our own nets be in good repair through our powerful scripture study, our meaningful prayers, and our consecrated obedience to the 17 points.

All my love,  
President Kunz