

Sermon File # 734

Sermon Title: *The Risen Jesus Confronts Our Futility*

Scripture Text: John 21:1-14

Manuscript written by Roger Roberts

And sermon preached at International Baptist Church, Brussels, Belgium

On Sunday Morning 20 May 2012

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.

For more information regarding this manuscript, contact Roger.Roberts@ibcbrussels.org.

All Rights Reserved.

The Risen Jesus Confronts Our Futility

Introduction:

This morning we continue to look into the last two chapters of the Fourth Gospel reporting appearances of the risen Jesus to his disciples. Last Sunday we looked at Jesus' second appearance to the disciples in the Upper Room for the special benefit of Thomas. The Doubter was transformed into a solid believer. The main body of John's Gospel ends with the concluding statement in 20:31. But just as John has a prologue in chapter one (verses 1-18), so with chapter twenty-one he adds an epilogue. This final chapter (21) underscores the worldwide mission given to the church to carry the Gospel that John has just proclaimed.

In our text for today we will note the lesson our risen Lord gave to seven of the disciples, particularly the fishermen among them. It's important to observe the evidence that these seven disciples had already seen the risen Lord and were convinced he arose and was ascending to heaven, although periodically appearing to them on earth. No longer were they cowering in fear behind closed doors. In the Upper Room, Jesus had appeared to them and breathed on them the Holy Spirit as a foretaste of what they were to receive in fullness on the Day of Pentecost. The risen Lord also had given them his Great Commission to continue the work of the Father to bring the Gospel of forgiveness and salvation (John 20:21-23). Instead of hiding in fear, they had left Jerusalem and had gone to Galilee to keep their appointment with the risen Lord.

As we will note in our text, the risen Lord Jesus revealed himself to his disciples on a third occasion. Jesus turned an ordinary event, a fishing endeavor, into an extraordinary experience whereby the disciples learned an invaluable lesson. And what they learned will become for each one of us here today an important truth from a life-changing lesson.

Follow as I read John **21:1-14**.

In recent days I have become aware that many of you are struggling with challenges in your daily lives—perhaps with an unbelieving spouse, a difficult job or a need for employment or legal status. Some apparently are in conflict with difficult and demanding people and with unjust treatment and unrewarding and unappreciated work, perhaps as a result of the European financial crisis. Some of you are struggling with health issues that threaten personal, family and financial stability. Even though as a church, God is faithfully at work and we're enjoying peace, unity and growth, many of us may be wondering what he is doing or apparently not doing in our personal lives. I can almost say that we're all in some sort of crisis.

Not all crises are negative experiences. A crisis is a significant change or turning point or transition, usually requiring a major adjustment. A new job, moving to a new location, or the birth of a child are crises. If you don't think the birth of a child is a crisis, an experience demanding change and adjustment, just ask the parents of a newborn. Crises also, for us believers, make us aware of our dependence on God.

As you face a transition in your pastoral leadership in coming months and as Nancy and I face the challenge of our unknown future, we are in need of a fresh encounter with the risen Lord. The risen Jesus will give us a new incentive for mission and ministry and motivate others to join with us in kingdom work in this strategic place and wherever he might send us. We need a word of encouragement and a new directive from the risen Lord.

My prayer is that the risen Lord Jesus will make himself known to us today, and that you will receive the same kind of encouragement I need, as we join these seven disciples on their fishing expedition that became an encounter with the risen Lord Jesus. Jesus turned an ordinary fishing excursion into a divine encounter that would leave a permanent lesson in the minds of these disciples and would give invaluable teaching to the church throughout the ages. In his encounter with these seven disciples, Jesus taught...

The futility of our efforts apart from him (verses 1-5)

A truth that stands out in our text about the unsuccessful fishing effort of these seven disciples is that the risen Lord Jesus is concerned about the ordinary events of our lives, not just the so-called spiritual disciplines and major turning points of life. The Lord can transform the ordinary and turn these everyday experiences into life-changing and positive crises.

Notice the revelation of the risen Lord takes place in...

Our normal, daily ventures...

A lot of scholarship has spilled much ink, spoiled much paper and wasted much time speculating about the reasons these seven disciples went fishing. As George R Beasley-Murray wrote, "Never has a fishing trip been so severely judged" (*John*, page 399, volume 36, *Word Biblical Commentary*). Certainly their minds were swimming over the events of recent days as the Lord made the two dramatic appearances in the Upper Room. The risen Jesus was alternately ascending to heaven and descending to earth to appear to his disciples, giving them the Great Commission and preparing them for his final ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, which would be 50 days after his resurrection. But the fact is, these disciples had gone back to Galilee from Jerusalem, and were preparing to meet him in the appointed place (Mark 16:7; Matthew 28:7).

I doubt if their going fishing was an act of disobedience, as some conjecture. Nor was it done in despair, with their thinking there was no future in ministry with the risen Lord. Admittedly, they were not yet the Spirit-empowered, fully victorious men they would later become on the Day of Pentecost. But the fact is, they probably went fishing rather than remain idle as they awaited another appearing from the Lord. I like the above-quoted scholar's suggestion that the seven went fishing because they were hungry! (Beasley-Murray). Being fishermen, this was the best way to address this "felt need."

However, the risen Jesus used this occurrence to teach the disciples some important truths about trusting him for even the ordinary, daily ventures of life. Jesus cares about everything we do, and desires to be Lord over all, including the very ordinary. Jesus is preparing to impress the disciples once again with their role in the work of the Great Commission. These are chapters important to the church and its leaders, but also to the entire church. God uses his church in the ordinary ventures of daily life. The way the church penetrates the world is through people like you and me, going about our daily business of living in the "worlds" where he has planted us. Jesus gives the church certain assignments, such as the ministry of the preaching of the Word, and corporate worship and missionary and evangelistic endeavors. But his strategy of penetrating and influencing the world takes place in homes, schools, offices, factories, stores, banks and hospitals, that is, wherever God's people live and move about.

These disciples were fishermen, and they were doing what they knew how to do. I believe it's important for us to realize that Jesus cares about and even sanctifies the ordinary. It's unbiblical and inaccurate to assume that the Lord Jesus cares only what ordained ministers, pastors and other "official" spiritual leaders do. The ways we connect with the lost world are minor compared with the numerous everyday contacts of lay men and women, places where God is at work making himself known.

The challenge for us is to not think of ourselves just as a part of a missionary church, but to realize that each one of us is a *missional* disciple, a flower of Christ, a representative of Christ, and that all of our life is an expression of being with him on mission, even in the everyday and the ordinary. And we need to be reminded by the words of the late Francis Schaeffer that in the kingdom of God there are no little

people. And there are no little churches. As he would show the disciples, our normal, daily ventures...

Are to be done along with him, and with dependence on him.

One obvious lesson Jesus wants to teach his disciples is that the entire Christian life, even in the ordinary ways and familiar places, is to be lived with total dependence on him. True Christian freedom comes through submission and obedience to and dependence on God. In speaking of himself as the true vine and us as the branches connected to the vine, Jesus said, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Of course, this is to say that we can do nothing of eternal value and that pleases and honors God apart from depending on Christ. The fishing disciples were to be reminded of this lesson only after a long night of unsuccessful labor.

These veteran fishermen went about their labor, using their best techniques and giving their best efforts. They went to the most promising places on the lake, and went at the best time for fishing, and there was no logical reason they would not be successful. Yet they toiled through the long hours of the night and caught nothing.

I wonder how long it took them before they began to remember a previous, unsuccessful fishing expedition? It was years before when Jesus called them to be his disciples. As at this time, the fishermen disciples had "worked hard all night and caught nothing." But Jesus commanded them to try again under his direction, and they caught so many fish their nets began to break. Simon Peter was so overwhelmed by this miracle that he fell at Jesus' knees in awe, and asked him to depart because Simon Peter felt so sinful and unworthy (Luke 5:1-11). Jesus was revealing himself to the disciples as the one who would give them grace and success in fishing for men, in doing kingdom work. But they would be absolutely dependent on him for their success. They would depend on his direction and his power for the intended results.

Kingdom living is designed to be God-dependent. We cannot do work that pleases him and that has eternal significance apart from total reliance on God, who gives direction from his word and power through his Spirit. These fisherman no doubt were beginning to remember their former failed expedition and what Jesus had taught them. And for us, we too can go about our daily lives, and can do so with apparent and qualified success. Our lives can be busy and in some ways productive. You can even please your boss and impress others and be considered successful by many. But apart from Christ, your life cannot be successful and fruitful. Your life cannot produce the fruit of the Spirit, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Nor can you bear the fruit of others led to faith in Christ through a faithful and godly life and clear testimony of Christ's work in your life.

I don't know if as yet you have come to realize a certain level of spiritual failure in your life. You may be feeling some disappointment, disillusionment, or frustration. You may be frustrating and disappointing others, those who care about you and who may depend on you, such as your spouse or children. The good news is that after the long night of labor, Jesus graciously meets us at the point of our failure.

It was still so early the figure of Jesus a hundred yards away on shore was undetectable to them. He called out to them (5), “Friends, haven’t you any fish?” A good paraphrase would be, “Boys (or lads), haven’t you caught anything?” He spoke affectionately and familiarly to them, confronting their failure, but in a loving, gracious way. As has been said, in this encounter, Jesus “sanctified failure,” just as he had sanctified the ordinary.

The well-known, late British journalist and writer, Malcolm Muggeridge, said that “failure is the most creative phenomenon of life,” and is the experience that allows us to make spiritual progress (quoted by Kent Hughes, page 464, *John: That You May Believe*). Ever since Golgotha, Jesus works through, not our strength, but our weakness. This is why the disciples had difficulty believing their messiah and deliver should have to die. They were the product of centuries of Jewish expectations of a powerful political deliverer, who would usher in an immediate new age. The idea of a crucified Savior was an adjustment to their thinking, to say the least. Now they were learning that, just as God brought salvation through a crucified Messiah, so he would continue his work through weak men and women who would find their strength and deliverance by death to self and the resurrection power of God.

For years I thought of my ministry as something powerful, relying on a large church and large staff, in a place of leadership and prestige. And then God stripped me of all of that. I came to a realization that I had done nothing but fail. God was able to accomplish things through my life, despite me and certainly not because of me. I would preach and teach about the crucified life, yet all the while thinking I was quite important.

Much too late in my ministry I was confronted with my failure to live and serve and lead in a way that allowed for God’s full power and working and resultant fruitfulness. I tried so long to be somebody, forgetting what Paul says about God’s preference for using nobodies, that he might receive the glory (1 Corinthians 1:26-31). Some nine or ten years ago I heard, as it were, the voice of Jesus asking, “Roger, my boy, have you caught anything?” Jesus confronted my failure, and I had to make a painful admission. But also, because Jesus is gracious, he sanctified my failure, and I received a liberating new beginning.

Maybe the most difficult thing for you also is to be confronted with your spiritual weakness and futility of effort. Like me, you tried your best to be the spouse and parent and spiritual leader of your family you ought to be, but it has been unfruitful, frustrating. You know you should give a witness for Christ of a godly life, and must learn to rise above the current level of your moral and spiritual discipline. But you have come up empty after hard work and after giving it your best effort. But Jesus taught his disciples and he teaches us that, after realizing and admitting the futility of our efforts, comes...

The success of working along with him (verses 6-11)

Jesus met the disciples at the point of their futility. They were on their way to shore, and had given up. The “giving up” was to be the necessary preparation for Jesus’ revelation, his appearing to them. Maybe you too are at the point of giving up.

You've tried for so long to overcome problems, conduct, and habits you know are displeasing to God, disruptive to your life and destructive of relationships. Maybe you are about to give up in your witness to and prayers for your unconverted spouse or rebellious, unbelieving child. Now that you've given up, are throwing in the towel, and heading for shore, is the time to be aware of...

The always-present Jesus...

Even though the disciples were unaware of him, Jesus was on the shore all the time. He had done his own fishing, I assume, and was preparing breakfast for these weary, defeated disciples. Verse 4 says that, "the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus." You and I have been living and toiling, fretting and now ready to give up. But all along, Jesus has been with us, waiting on the sidelines, on the shoreline. Though we have been oblivious of him, he has been faithful to us. We have never been outside of his grace and care. During the long midnight hours of life, when we are toiling away and our labor and living seem to be of naught, it's certainly a lot more difficult to affirm the love, goodness and faithfulness of God.

When I think back over years of difficult ministry and struggles with leadership issues in our most recent ministry, I have difficulty not thinking that those years were totally wasted. It seems like a gap of twenty years that could have been spent in a more productive ministry. Yet I have better moments when I realize that God was nevertheless at work, and was teaching and shaping me and working, sometimes despite all my best efforts. Jesus was there all the time, certainly caring for me and for my family. The fact that our children are living for Jesus is evidence that he was there during unproductive years of personal struggle and outwardly unproductive ministry. And he's been present with you too, even during times when you've strayed from his will. Jesus came alongside these disciples, a group that included a doubter, a denier and a couple of personally ambitious brothers.

Perhaps there's a word of encouragement here also for those who are troubled and anxious about children or others who have strayed from God, or who have a loved one who has contracted a serious illness. If they are his children, God hasn't abandoned them, even when it appears they are totally oblivious to him.

And, Jesus on the shore...

Gives his words of encouragement and direction...

Although these disciples do not yet know it's the Lord, his voice speaks with authority and they obey. Sometimes God speaks and we don't recognize it's his voice. Sometimes God speaks through friends and circumstances and even through our enemies. But always God speaks to his people. And we are usually more in tune to hear his voice when we meet with failure and have given up our own independent efforts at life. When the disciples heard and obeyed, then things immediately became different.

God's work is not done *for* him. It's to be done *with* him. Kingdom living and working are to be done God's way. So much of our life and work is done for God, and is futile and unrewarding. How many become discouraged, and cry out to God, "I've

been living for you and serving you, and look what I get for it.” That’s the problem. It’s been self-generated and self-directed. God, on the other hand, is already at work, and he simply invites us to join him. His projects are already underway.

I don’t think the disciples were being overtly disobedient by going fishing. But I do think that the risen Jesus was teaching them the importance of waiting on him. Peter was always the impulsive, take-charge guy who plunged ahead of everyone else. This is the way we can do Christian work, plunging ahead before waiting for God’s leading and directing. We hear the popular phrase of the frantic person in need of action: “Don’t just stand there. Do something!” But often God’s word to us is, “Don’t do something. Just stand there! Stand and wait and pray.” The risen Jesus instructed his disciples, “But *stay* in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49).

This is true in our personal lives. God is sovereign and he desires to lead us by the Holy Spirit, who speaks to us through Scripture, prayer, circumstances and the church, that is, wise and godly and prayerful people. God isn’t playing games with us, especially not “hide and seek.” If you earnestly desire to know God’s will, and experience his anointing on your life, he will not disappoint you or lead you astray. I’ve talked with some heartbroken Christians who became panicky about their future, maybe fearful of remaining single all their lives, and instead of waiting on God’s direction and timing, they plunged into a relationship with a non-Christian. Not waiting for God’s direction can leave you alone in a dark nighttime “expedition,” and bring disappointment and a lifetime of regret.

Churches too can plunge ahead, just doing something for God, instead of waiting on God. We do well to seek God’s face in prayer before undertaking any venture. As a church, God has given us effective ministries and perhaps is leading us to begin new ones. But before we launch into new ones, we must wait till we are certain we see God at work and inviting us to join him. Perhaps in some activities, we have been “fishing on the wrong side of the boat,” and have toiled through the night and caught nothing. Let’s listen to hear what God says, and when we follow his directives, we’ll be fishing on the right side of the boat. I believe, even in this so-called non-responsive country of Belgium, there are souls Jesus is drawing to himself, and he will show where and how to fish for people. Also, as you “fish” for the next pastor, it’s crucial to wait for God’s direction and not rush ahead of his leading.

I believe the word “frustrated” need not be in the believer’s vocabulary. If we are walking with the risen Lord and listening to his voice, things are happening that he wants to take place. You may not be able to see all the results that God can see, but he is at work. If you’re frustrated, you are imposing your own timetable and expectations upon God. You’re trying to make things happen in your own way and time. Try waiting on and listening for God’s voice and direction for your life.

The disciples simply did what Jesus said...

And the “catch” is gathered in.

Imagine the surprise of these disciples who were simply going through the motions, perhaps all the time thinking this also would be a futile, last-ditch effort after a long

night of futility. They simply obeyed the voice, or tried this suggestion, and were in for a huge surprise. All of a sudden their net was filled with a great catch of large fish. Perhaps at that moment John realized the one who had called to them and who was responsible for this immediate success was Jesus. No doubt, after recognizing the Lord and realizing he was responsible for the great catch of fish, the disciples remembered the task of “fishing for men,” a directive given the disciples at the very outset of their calling to follow Jesus (Mark 1:17; Luke 5:10).

A lot of our frustration is from our own expectations going unmet. We’ve sometimes followed our own agenda, gone fishing on our own, and wondered why we are disappointed and frustrated. What is needed is the dropping of our agenda, and simply asking, “OK, Lord, what would *you* have me to do?” And then we join him and he works through us with an unbroken net.

With his typically impulsive reaction, Simon Peter wrapped his outer garment around himself and jumped into the water and hastened toward Jesus. After they all got to shore, Peter got back into the boat and hauled ashore the net full of fish. He really was *The Big Fisherman!* John remarks that even though the net was filled with 153 large fish, the net was not broken. Perhaps John included this number to show what a large haul of large fish it was, and yet the net was unbroken. The net perhaps represents the unified church that God will use to bring in the “caught fish” of the kingdom. God cannot use torn, divided nets, that is, churches. Any tear or division in the fellowship of God’s church contributes to its weakness and disqualifies it from useful kingdom service.

I think this speaks of the fact that the local church is indispensable for the work of mission in the Great Commission. We cannot render effective service in the kingdom apart from being netted into and together with the church. We need and depend on each other, just as every strand in the fishing net. And we cannot afford for there to be torn strands that will weaken the net. Satan will do his best work and give his most persistent efforts to divide the church by creating factions and rivalries in the church. This leads to lost credibility in the message of the church. Division quenches and grieves the Holy Spirit, who alone empowers the church for its worship, witness, ministries and fellowship.

The unbroken net means there is no limit to the number of converts who can be won for Christ when he is in charge of our fishing for men and women, boys and girls. And none will be lost. The catch of fish is gathered in with an unbroken net with the full number of fish.

A lot of conjecture has been offered about the significance of the number of fish, the 153. But the fact remains, John doesn’t seem to be attaching any more significance than the fact that there was a specific number. I believe the exact number expresses the fact that every convert, child of God is important. God knows those who are his (2 Timothy 2:19, where Paul quotes Numbers 16:5). All he has chosen will be gathered in. The gospel will be preached to all nations and then the end will come (Mark 13:10). And God saves single individuals, one at a time. You are important to Christ, who would have died just for you, had you been the only lost sinner on earth in need of his redemption.

And the disciples didn't know how many fish there were until they got to shore. Nor do we know how many lives we may touch with the gospel until we arrive on "the other shore." Some are so busy counting "fish" and comparing their numbers with others they may be surprised to find out some day how little real "fishing" they in fact did. I'm afraid I come from a denomination that has placed a lot of emphasis on counting fish, and even pressuring its missionaries to reach a catch quota. I'm also aware that many are pressured into ungodly exaggeration and fabrication of statistics.

This says something to you who are praying for and sharing the gospel with unsaved family and friends. Your part is to simply remain faithful. God will do his part. If he has burdened your heart for their salvation, that's good evidence he intends to draw them by his grace in his time. That also says something to this church. As we remain faithful in our worship and in the ministries God has given and will give us, he will gather the "fish," the converts, in his way and time, even here in Belgium, which has been so unresponsive to the gospel. The Holy Spirit alone can produce converts, and he can break through the most obstinate barrier of the coldest hearts in the most spiritually dark part of the earth, wherever that may be. Our part here at IBC is simply to listen for his voice and follow his directives, joining him in his work of making worshipers around his throne.

Through this "living parable," Jesus also taught...

The ultimate goal of fellowship with him (verses 12-14)

How interesting it was that Jesus had already caught some fish of his own and had prepared breakfast for these tired, hungry fishermen-disciples! This shows that Jesus doesn't need us, but simply allows us to join his work, and also desires to have fellowship with him, which is symbolized by the meal. There on the lakeshore, as the disciples drew near to him the risen Lord offered them...

A gracious invitation...

Again, Jesus not once rebuked the disciples for their denying, deserting, and even, as did Thomas, doubting him. He simply once again descended to visit with them, and he offered them his gracious, loving fellowship. And the same is true for us. He deeply loves us and desires to share with us his loving presence. This was the reason Jesus suffered the cross, that we might be with him forever (John 17:24).

Today the crucified and risen Lord Jesus is calling you to be with him in a personal, life-changing and everlasting relationship. He is willing to forgive all your past failures and sins, and will remember them no more. As you respond to his love in faith and repentance, he freely opens his arms to you. He calls you to eat with him and he with you (Revelation 3:20). The risen Lord invites you...

To a joyful feast.

Jesus invited the disciples to dine with him. Jesus cared about their condition and addressed their immediate, temporal needs. Perhaps the disciples then

remembered the way Jesus had compassion on the multitudes when he fed the 5,000 men, along with additional women and children (Matthew 14:13-21, etc.), and later, the 4,000 plus (Matthew 15:32-39, etc.). The risen Lord also cares about your every need, and will supply every need of yours “according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19). This is something you need to realize, your dependence on Jesus for your daily bread (Matthew 6:11). He wants us to ask, depend on and trust in him for all our needs, and not all our wants. He will give us everything we need to live for him and serve him.

This says something to us about the desire of the risen Lord to feast with us in his continuous presence. The feeding of the 5,000 was in the context of Jesus’ revelation of himself as the Bread of Life (John 6:1-65). Here Jesus spoke of our need to imbibe his life into our lives, and to feed upon the Spirit, who alone can satisfy the deepest needs of our lives. We were created to know God, and we can never have true joy, peace and satisfaction apart from living in full fellowship with the risen Lord Jesus. We depend on him for our needs. But spiritual maturity grows beyond simply depending on Jesus. It moves into enjoying Jesus. We are to find him to be our greatest delight and joy. We are to find ourselves less dependent on the material and even tranquility of circumstances. The greatest maturity is achieved when we learn to delight in difficulties, knowing that during difficulty we receive more of God’s grace in our lives (2 Corinthians 12:10).

How this perspective could change our enjoyment level! There is not a person here today who is not invited to the Savior’s “breakfast.” Every morning you can come into his presence and feast on his delights. You may need to retire a little earlier at night, and arise a bit earlier in the morning. But Jesus awaits you with his breakfast of the Word and prayer. And throughout the day he wants you to live in his presence and find full joy in him. As you go about your daily routine, even in a stressful office environment, he wants you to see him standing on the lakeshore, having prepared a meal for you. As you toil throughout the day and think your work is meaningless, he wants to give you encouragement and direction and for you to mentally and spiritually “come ashore” for awhile and let him feed you and restore your soul.

The ultimate goal is not that we escape hell and have hope for some type of paradise. The ultimate goal that the risen Lord Jesus has for us is to have fellowship with him. As is stated in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, “The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.”

We enjoy him now and we will enjoy him forever. It may well have been that when the disciples were breaking bread with Jesus on this particular morning, that they thought of the last time he had broken bread with them. That was when he instituted his Last Supper with them, giving them the bread and wine, symbolic of his impending death for them (Matthew 26:26-29). And Jesus had promised them then that he would not drink again of that fruit of the vine until the day he would “drink it anew” with them in his Father’s kingdom. Perhaps as Jesus broke the bread with them on this morning, they remembered that he had promised the new day in the kingdom when they would enjoy the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9). And this is also our blessed hope that we too will feast with Jesus in his consummated everlasting kingdom prepared for us. Then all unfruitful toil will be over. And we will evermore rejoice with the harvest we have gathered. As the

disciples brought the 153 fish ashore, so we are promised that after the toil of the harvest, the sowing of seeds with weeping, shall come the harvest with rejoicing, “bringing our sheaves” with us (Psalm 126:6).

Let this be a word of encouragement to us while we labor when there seems to be little fruit. If we are waiting on the Lord and listening for his instruction, there will be fruit that even we don’t know about. The disciples weren’t busy counting fish. While they were following the Lord’s directive, they had no idea how many fish were in the net.

And you have no idea how God is blessing and using your life, your prayers and your witness. But when you get to the “other shore,” you will find out how many are in heaven because of you and how God worked through your life. They will then be for you your everlasting joy and crown (1 Thessalonians 2:19). As Alexander Maclaren said, the consequences of what we have done on earth will make up no small part of the blessedness of heaven (page 356, volume 11, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*).

Conclusion:

Today the risen Lord is here to remind us that he is keenly aware of our labors and our disappointments, not only in ministry but in the daily affairs of our lives. He cares that we are toiling “on the midnight sea” (Maclaren). And he wants to come to us to offer us his encouragement and new direction and sense of purpose. As Maclaren also said, “They only see aright who see Christ in everything” (page 360, above citation). If we could see Christ in all our events and living, what a difference there would be in our thinking, feeling and acting!

He asks us, “How’s fishing? How is your job satisfaction, your life, relationships and sense of peace and wellbeing?” He is deeply interested in our normal routine as well as our service in his church. He knows what we need and where the resources are. Our failure actually becomes his blessing. Again, as Maclaren says, “The consciousness of my failure is the pre-requisite to my appeal to him to prosper my work.” He, by his grace, “beats the self-confidence out of us,” and “makes us know we are empty in order that he may pour himself into us, and flood us with the joy of his presence” (page 352, vol. 11, *Expositions*).

Are you aware of and willing to admit your failure and emptiness? Jesus comes alongside us today to give us his encouragement and new direction, as we wait upon him, empty ourselves, and then ask him to fill us and lead us anew. I invite us all to look ashore and see the risen Lord Jesus. And let’s listen to his voice and follow him. This is his church and these are his lives. Let’s give it all to him, as we join him in his work and enjoy him at his banqueting table.

Questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:

1. What does this passage of Scripture say about the interest of the risen Lord Jesus in the normal routine of our daily lives?

2. What role does Jesus want to play in our ordinary, daily lives?
3. What did Jesus say we could do apart from him (John 15:5)? Since people can obviously live their mortal lives without any faith in God, what does Jesus mean by saying, "Without me you can do nothing"?
4. What is the reason for spiritual failure, that is, failure to live and serve in a way God intends for us and that pleases and glorifies him?
5. Why is it important that we as Christians and churches be confronted with our failure?
6. What does our text tell us about the key to spiritual success as individuals and as a church?
7. The breakfast that Jesus prepared for his disciples is an apt expression of his desire to provide our material needs as well as our daily spiritual food. Do you think he wants to feed you his daily bread in a morning quiet time? If so, how is your daily time with the Lord? Is it feeding you?
8. Ask the Lord to strengthen your faith and faithfulness as you join him in the work of "fishing for people." Also, ask that he will bless your prayers and witness with the eventual salvation of your friends and family who are lost.

All Rights Reserved.