

It is the Lord!

The Gospel of John 21:1-14

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

April 10, 2016 – Third Sunday of Easter



Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Over the years people have tried to read into this text a great deal more than is actually there. For example, St. Jerome found great significance in the fact that John chose to report the number of fish the disciples caught – 153. On the other hand, St. Augustine, had an entirely different, I dare say, ingenious, explanation for John's use of this number. After a great deal of mathematical wizardry Augustine surmised that the number John reported stood for the number of people – who either by Law or God's grace – had been moved to believe in Jesus Christ as a result of this miracle! Yet the truth of the matter is that it's probably best to allow the plain, simple meaning of the text to stand on its own – that through a series of events, while John and some others were fishing, Jesus appeared, stood on the shore, and when John saw Him he called out to Peter, saying, "It is the Lord!"

Now this particular appearance of Christ was the third time the disciples had seen Him since the Resurrection. The first two were behind closed doors where they hiding for fear of the Jews. Yet, there's a common thread that connects these three events. That common thread is fear – fear, which in each case, Jesus went to great lengths to calm. After Good Friday, the disciples had a great deal to fear from the enemies of Jesus, who might well have done the same thing to them that had been done to their Lord. It's also possible they were fearful Jesus hadn't actually risen from the dead. Could they have been afraid of being left "Lordless" – that Jesus *had* actually died on Good Friday never to rise again – and that that was the end of the matter?

But there's a third possibility. Do you remember Thomas' words: "*Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my hand into His side, I simply will not believe?*" Thomas' words, I sus-

pect, betray a fear we all have as mortals – namely that we don't know how to relate to the risen Lord Jesus. After all, what do any of us have in common with God's Only-Begotten Son freshly alive and risen from the dead? What would you think if you saw someone rise from the dead – even if they had told you beforehand they were going to do it – and even if you thought you believed them? Our Lord's disciples, you see, they knew the *Man* – the One who had lived among them, with Whom they'd eaten many meals and shared many an hour fishing, the One who'd laughed and cried with them so many times over the past three years. But *that* Jesus was no longer present. Now *all* they had was the resurrected Christ. They were fearful of what might come out of this new relationship built between them and the Jesus they once knew and loved – this One who had only recently risen from the grave.

As joyful as they must have been over the thought of Christ's resurrection, they still had lots of questions. But don't we all have some of the very same struggles? We've all read the Bible stories about the Man. We've seen Him in our mind's eye holding little ones in His arms and telling His disciples: "let the little children come unto Me, and do not hinder them, for such is the kingdom of God." We've seen the paintings of the Good Shepherd standing with His shepherd's staff in one hand, as He tenderly cradles one of His beloved sheep in the other. Even now I'll bet you can see Him standing at Lazarus' tomb and weeping over the death His dear friend. These are the pictures of Jesus we're all familiar with – and that's how we expect to see Him.

In a manner of speaking, we tend think of Him as one of us – and certainly in many ways that's true. He *is* that One who "was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and made Man." As a Man we can all relate to Him, but, what about in His resurrection? Is He still the same Man – the

same God-in-human-flesh Man we've come to know through Holy Scripture – the One who weeps when we weep, and laughs when we laugh? Those are the same types of questions the disciples, no doubt, must have also been asking themselves. Jesus, of course, would soon put their concerns and questions to rest by His actions on the shore that day. And isn't it interesting that all this should take place there – where Jesus conducted most of His ministry – where, on a hill close by, He once fed close to 10,000 people with only a few fish and barley loaves – where, in Cana of Galilee, He turned water into wine rather than embarrass the host of a wedding – where, out on the surface of this very sea, Jesus had once quieted a raging storm, and bid Simon Peter to come to Him on the water? It was there where Jesus called His disciples and performed the miracle of the great catch of fish.

And so now – just a few short days after His resurrection, we again see the Figure of Jesus standing on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, once more telling His disciples that they were about catch a huge draught of fish – so that John, undoubtedly remembering His previous miracles – shouted out, “It is the Lord!” This Jesus wasn't a vision, a ghost, or a spirit of someone long dead. This was the very same Christ they all knew and loved. Though His body had been glorified, what stood before them was the very same body that only a few days earlier had been crushed for their sins and pierced for their iniquity. It *was* the Lord – the One who so tenderly had sought and taught them – who just a few short feet from where they were fishing had fed the multitudes with only a small amount of food – who once had calmed a storm and called them to fish for men. John was right, *it was the Lord!*

Dear friends, the disciples' only comfort at that moment – and indeed, our only hope of comfort at any time – is in the knowledge that this One who was raised from the dead is the very same One who makes Himself known to us in Holy Scripture – and who, here at this font, makes Himself known to little ones in Holy Baptism – and who,

in bread and wine, feeds His people with His very own body and blood for the forgiveness of their sins. The truth is that none of us would have any hope at all of relating to God apart from the Person and flesh of our Savior. A few years ago, Dr. Dean Wenthe – former president the Seminary in Fort Wayne – penned these words concerning how we ought to think of Christ. Citing Luther, he wrote: “These are the tokens you shall mark – the swaddling-clothes and manger dark – there is where you shall find the Infant laid, by whom the heavens and earth were made.”

He went on, saying: “This stanza from one of Luther's hymns might seem a strange point of departure for addressing the question of Lutheran identity. But I would suggest that, beyond its suitability for the seasons of Christmas and Epiphany, *here* is the very core of what it means to be a confessing Lutheran – namely, the real presence of Christ. That God the Father would choose a young woman in a remote part of the Roman Empire during the reign of Caesar Augustus to bear His Only-Begotten Son is a remarkable claim. But even more striking is the narrative of His life that led to His atoning death on the cross for our redemption. His bodily Resurrection and Ascension are the defining moment of all time, as the entire creation awaits His appearing at the end of the Age.”

As St. John peered through the darkness of those pre-dawn hours on the Sea of Galilee he proclaimed, “It is the Lord!” And indeed, it was. Christ *has* risen just as He said! And even now He's here among us, here in this very place, glorified, yet invisible, still providing for our every need. Enfleshed in His Word He still gives Himself to us in water, bread and wine – as the One who shed His very lifeblood so that we might have life – and as the One who here sustains us, body and soul, unto everlasting life. Look, all around you. It is the Lord! Therefore, be at peace! In Jesus' name. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.