

Gone Fishing

“Serve.”

John 21:15-17

God's Thinkers and Tinkers: taking care of God's stuff #2

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Fishing

Have you ever had one of those times that you just needed some time off? The schedule's just been too packed for too long. Too many people have made too many demands. And there's been one trauma after another. So, you need a vacation.

Time to rest and heal your soul. Remember to laugh. Take moments that don't have to be productive because, as I once read on a plaque in a friend's home: "The time you enjoy wasting is not wasted time."

So, you head for the mountains...or the seashore...or the northern woods. And some of us head for the boat to be cast on the waters so that soon a line with hook and bait and lure could then, in its turn, be cast in.

Fishing.

First or second year out of school a friend from church gave me a call on a Saturday night...late on a Saturday night when I had to preach the next day. Short vacation. We went to his grandfather's house where there was a lake and a dock and a boat and all the fishing equipment we needed. Then after sunset we cast off, the trawling motor humming slowly and cast our lines in as we circled the lake. It's calming out there when you listen to the water splashing gently against the boat and you watch the stars clear in the sky. You feel pockets of warm air as you pass through in the cooling night.

10:00, eleven, twelve: no bites. It was like another friend told me once when I asked him how fishing was when he was out for a weekend. "I'll tell you, John," he said, "the fishin' was great. The catchin' wasn't so good; but the fishin' was fine." My friend caught a couple small ones he threw back in. I hadn't even caught a weed.

12:30 and we decided to turn back. I had to rise early the next day and it was already late. My friend was just beginning to turn the throttle when something took hold on the end of my line and bowed my pole sharp toward the water. My friend, more the

fisherman, was more excited than me. He coached me to draw in and give slack and play the fish to the side of the boat. This was no small bluegill tickling the line. It leapt from the water, diving down and I did exactly as my friend directed...until the fish was to the side of the boat and he reached with the net, raising it into the boat.

It was this big.

Well, maybe more this size. So then, very late, we brought the boat to the dock and went home. I preached very well the next morning. Sleep deprived, I had had my rest another way.

I was revitalized.

Sometimes you need time apart. Let the world go by. Watch it, or hear about it later. Sometimes you just need to refresh your soul.

Called In

So Jesus' friend Peter told them, "I'm going fishing." Peter, who had followed Jesus from the beginning, all the long and sometimes very hard way. No fan of book learning, he yet sat at the Master's feet and listened and learned. He'd gone to the people with him, cared for them sometimes late into the night. Travelled to the North and all the long way to the South – all on foot – preaching and teaching and healing, he learned how to proclaim the heaven on earth Jesus offered; was prepared and sent to do it himself. They often ate little, sometimes had no place to stay, yet they pressed on 'til the angry ones closed in. This was Peter, who boasted that he'd go to his death for Jesus; and then when it came down to it, he ran.

He denied him three times like a divorce. And having let Jesus down, he watched his Lord die.

How could you get more tired than that?

So Peter said that he'd go fishing and the rest said they'd come along and all through the night the fishin' must have been better than the catchin'.

Until the stranger on the shore, too far away to make out, called to them asking how it was. Then he said, "Throw the net on the other side," and when they did they got a catch the likes of which they'd never before seen. Then one of them figured out who it

was and said so; and that's when Peter couldn't wait for the boat to reach shore. He threw himself in the water and led the way as fast as Michael Phelps. Refreshed.

Breakfast on the beach with the Risen Lord. And Jesus took Peter aside and asked him, "Do you love me?" "You know I do." And Jesus answered him "Feed my sheep." Then Jesus asked him the same thing two more times with the same answer coming and the same calling given. This exchange, three times: it was like he was undoing the separation Peter had made.

Forgiveness. Restoration, that's what it was: true refreshment of the soul. Refreshed, so he was made like new.

Only with a twist. If there was really love, there would be service. Peter would have to embark on Jesus' way. Feed his lambs, feed his sheep: because this is the way of Jesus' love.

So Peter, Jesus' stinker, is made once again Jesus' thinker and tinker – sent once again to figure out how to put his love to use and then do it. Peter was made for this, and he'd ever be miserable, or disappointed, or bored if he didn't. Maybe he'd be all three.

After all, what's the use being a Christian if it doesn't really make any difference? What's the use of being heavenly-minded if you are no earthly good?

The way to love Jesus is to serve him. Service in the church: making a spiritual home for us to thrive in his Spirit together and changing the world into the place God wants it to be.

It's the reason we're made in the image of God: you and me.

Last year, I imagine the lot of you were just about to go fishing. I bet that many of you had already been to too many church meetings deciding on Master Plans and Capital Fund Drives and building projects. I bet you'd been around here a lot with extra clean-ups and farewells to pastors, on top of all the usual things being a church requires.

Exhausting.

Yet, when Laura and James and I arrived, there were a number who stayed back.

You stayed back to feed Jesus' sheep. You stayed back and planted gardens in the parsonage yard. You stayed back and gave hours to spiff up the house, readying it as it was passed from one family to another.

You stayed back and continued to serve the people of the world and the people on these streets. You continued to teach kids the Faith and took care of the ill and broken and nurtured your fellowship, one-with-another. You fed Jesus' lambs.

You stayed back and cooked extra meals for a new pastor's family when they were harried by moving and exhausted from chemotherapy. You hosted or went to picnics to welcome us. You literally fed Jesus' sheep.

And I hope that you knew how alive you were, how evident it was to Laura and James and me that you were Jesus' people not just in name but in action.

Laborers of Love

Because this is what God made you to be: Jesus' people who cast his love in the waters of life so that the world will be convinced about the remarkable grace of God.