

RANSOMED HEART

LOVE GOD. LIVE FREE.

January 2011

Dear Friends,

I have been thinking a lot about Jesus lately – yearning to know him better than I do, yearning for more of his life flowing through me. I've enjoyed uncovering some of his personality in the Gospels, and wanted to share this little treasure with you.

This episode takes place a week or so *after* Jesus saunters out of the tomb he borrowed. The Apostle John, one of Jesus' most intimate friends, recounts it:

Simon Peter, Thomas (called 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." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. 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. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water.

So many things are delicious about this story. First, notice that the boys have gone fishing. The events of the past month have been, to say the least, overwhelming. Their beloved Jesus was tortured, crucified, entombed. But then – fantastic beyond imagining – he appeared to them again, alive. Twice. Though at this moment, they're not sure where he has gone off to. Not really sure what to do next, they do what any self-respecting angler who needs to get out and clear his head does. They go fishing. Apparently, fishing naked or darn close to it – notice that Peter needed to put his clothes back *on*.

How *casually* Jesus enters the scene. This is the resurrected Lord, mind you. Ruler of the heavens and earth. Jesus could have announced his risen presence on the beach with radiant glory. He knows there is nothing in the world that would help his mates more than to see him again. He certainly could have shouted in his commanding way, "It is I, the LORD! Come thou unto me!" But he doesn't. He "hides" himself a moment longer to let this play out. He simply stands on the shore like your average tourist, and asks the question curious passers-by always do of fishermen: "Catch anything?"

The nonchalance of the Risen Christ here is absolutely intriguing. Whatever Jesus is up to, the moment is loaded for his next move. Now, two more things are needed to set the stage properly.

First, what would you guess Jesus' mood is this particular morning? Surely he must be happy. The man has conquered death. He is in the afterglow of the greatest triumph of the greatest battle in the history of the cosmos. I'm going to venture he is one mighty joyful man. And, how did these – his closest companions – first encounter Jesus? It was right here, along the shore of this very lake. Possibly this very spot, knowing how fishermen tend to keep a boat near their favorite hole. That first

compelling encounter also involved the fellas skunked after a night of fishing. It, too, began with a seemingly random instruction: “‘Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch...’ When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break” (Luke 5:4-6).

So, this has happened before. That first miraculous catch – nets bursting so that they needed help getting them ashore – it must have felt like ages ago, after all that has unfolded. Or unraveled, depending on your point of view. But it was *their* story, the way they got pulled into this whole adventure. So here they are, three years later...on that very beach...the boys skunked again...Jesus does it again.

“Try the other side.” Again the nets are bursting. It’s how he lets the boys know it’s him. This has the wink of an inside joke, that rich treasure of friendship, the running gag between mates where over time all you need to do is start the first line and everyone cracks up all over again. “Try the other side.” Another jackpot. Just like the good old days. Nothing more needs to be said – Peter is already in the water thrashing for shore.

Do you see the *playfulness* of Jesus?

His timing, the tension, his hiddenness, a tourist-like question, and then bang – the catch. And the boys are hooked again. This is a beautiful story, made so much richer *because of the playfulness* of Jesus.

And by the way, that little detail John tosses in – that the catch was 153 fish, precisely – that, too, is a beautiful touch. These retired fishermen, overcome with the joy of seeing Jesus, leave the writhing pile where it is, fully intending to get to it right after breakfast. Having had the cookout – which Jesus grilled, by the way – one of them says, “Well, we oughta get that catch counted up,” and a second says, “yep,” and Jesus, reaching for a last bite of roast perch, says, “There’s a hundred and fifty three.”

The boys smile at each other, realizing, *O yeah, right – we’ve got Jesus back.*

Any way you look at it, it is a beautiful story. Playful, funny, so human, so hopeful, so *unreligious*. And it is that particular quality that gives the passage its true character, and gives us an essential for knowing Jesus as he really is. The man is not religious; if he were, the story would have taken place in a religious setting – the Temple, perhaps, or at least a synagogue – and Jesus would have gathered them for a Bible study or prayer meeting.

I hope that this year you experience the playfulness of Jesus. That the two of you go deeper in your friendship with one another. That’s sure what I’m after. It’s what he’s after, too, with each of us.

So we send our love and blessing to you at the start of 2011. And we thank you for your love and friendship.


John