

“Jesus in the Kitchen”

**Introduction:** Last Monday, the PBS News Hour ran a piece that they entitled, “Doctor in the Kitchen.” It described the growing awareness in the health care industry that eating a healthy diet can both prevent, and treat disease. Instead of sending many patients home with a handful of prescription drugs for the treatment of high blood pressure, or diabetes, they are giving patients new recipes! Even more, some doctors have set up kitchens in which to hold office hours, serving patients samples of such healthy meals and teaching them how to cook in a healthy manner for themselves.

On this Mother’s Day when, hopefully, you have excused mom from her kitchen, we want to go with Jesus into his. We want to accompany our Great Physician to his campsite on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and the charcoal fire over which he was preparing a meal for his disciples. As they sat down around his picnic table (I’m sure there was a picnic table there...what campsite does not have one?!), what did this good doctor want to teach them in his kitchen? And what can we, the church, learn as we watch and listen in on their conversation? For this chapter is a word for the church. It is a word which affirms that the resurrection is not the end but the beginning, the beginning of the mission of the church as we join with Jesus to help make him known. What we’ll both see and hear is that our wisdom and power for this mission comes as we rely on Jesus, though the person of his Spirit and the spiritual discipline of prayer.

I. Beginning in Jerusalem

A. The last couple of weeks we’ve been at table with Jesus and his disciples on the day of resurrection, first in the village of Emmaus, where Jesus revealed himself as he shared a meal with two of his despondent followers, and then later that day in Jerusalem where Jesus ate some fish with a larger group of his followers (Lk. 24). At that last occasion, at the very end of his post-dinner discussion, Jesus charged his followers with their mission – to preach repentance and forgiveness in his name, as they bore witness to his death and resurrection. We said that to share this overall message of reconciliation is a high and holy calling, as well as a challenging one, but that Jesus promises the empowering presence of his Spirit to enable us to carry it out: “I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Lk. 24:49).

B. I wonder how these men and women heard this? I wonder if they had as difficult a time “staying put,” and waiting as we can have? Certainly, they didn’t live in an age where you could Google a request and receive an answer in two seconds, or less! Yet human nature being what it is, I’m fairly certain they could be as antsy and as tempted toward action and self-reliance as we can be. At the very least, these words of Jesus were a promise that his followers in any age could not hope to accomplish their mission in their own wisdom and strength; it would take a unique and supernatural equipping.

**Illustration:** I know boating season is almost upon us and many boat owners have already removed their winter shrink wrap and are busy sanding and painting the hulls of their motorboats and sailboats in preparation for launch. Now, I don’t know which kind of boat you prefer, but it does seem that spiritually, we like to feel like we’re at the helm of a motorboat. We like to envision ourselves plowing through the waves as we shove the throttle of our own action forward, rather than just raising our sails in prayer and waiting for the wind and breath of God’s Spirit to blow.

C. So it is worth noting that forty days later, after Jesus had left them to return to the Father in the event we have come to know as the ascension, Luke reports to us in Acts 1 that these followers were indeed “raising their sails” in prayer, waiting on God. Significantly, their waiting was not doing nothing; it consisted of regular and intentional and fervent prayer: “They [the 11] all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers” (1:14). This “active waiting” on God, we might call it, is a posture we see the followers of Jesus take throughout the book of Acts.

## II. Back in Galilee

A. One of the events that initially helped them take this posture is recorded in our reading for this morning in John 21. The disciples were back on old familiar turf in the region of Galilee. Specifically, they were at the lake where many of them had fished and from which Jesus had first fished for them. They were there because they remembered that Jesus had said he would meet them there. But they couldn’t find him anywhere so Peter decided to go fishing, and the rest figured this was not a bad idea. After all, they had families to support and it seemed as if their adventure with this Jesus fellow might be reaching its end. So into their boat they hopped. However, we read that though they were out all night, they caught nothing.

B. As they were making their way back to the shore, a figure appeared on the shore and called out, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?” As I mentioned when we looked briefly at this text on Easter Sunday, the last thing I would have wanted after being out all night and catching nothing is some smart-aleck from the campsite next to me, with coffee in one hand and donut in the other, reminding me of my failure! But Jesus is not a smart aleck. Rather, he often asks questions, simple ones at that, to help us face the reality of our situation. The underlying question seems to be: “Friends, how have you really done out there on your own, without me to guide and direct you?” “How has your self-reliance worked out for you?” To complete the lesson, he told them to throw their nets on the other side of the boat.

Illustration: Now, hearing direction is one thing; following it can be another, especially if we think we know best. Rama shared with me a time when she had gone on a vacation to Jamaica and got involved in a goat race at the resort where she was staying. Each contestant was given a goat and a short leash and warned before the race began not to get out ahead of the goat or even to its side because if the goat saw them, it would stop dead in its tracks. Sure enough, some of the big, beefy guys in the race refused to listen, ran out ahead of their goats and tried to muscle them to the finish line. But each one ended up flat on his back because their goat had come to a complete stop, digging in its heels. The winner was the one who stayed behind the goat, letting it lead.

C. When Peter and the disciples listened to the voice and instructions of Jesus, letting him lead and throwing their net where he had directed, it filled. It filled, John reports, with 153 fish. The meaning of that number has caused much speculation. Opinions range from an ancient belief that there were 153 species of fish, so that the catch represented all the nations, to the number representing 100 pagans plus 50 Jews plus the Trinity! What seems most likely is that this simply was such a large and unexpected catch that someone decided it would be fun to count it in order to share the news of just how tremendous it really was!

D. But what actually made this catch so powerful is that it was not the first time something like this had happened. Jesus gets their attention by evoking an old memory from three years earlier (Lk 5).

It was when Jesus had first called Peter to follow him. Peter had just experienced a night of catching nothing. In response, Jesus told him to throw his net on the other side, and it became filled to breaking. Then, Jesus told Peter that he would go on to equip him, along with others, to fish for and lead people into his kingdom. Sound familiar? So here, again, on that same body of water, with the same results, Jesus was reaffirming his missional call on these followers, and that the only way to do so was with the direction and guidance and power that come as we rely on him, through the person of his Spirit.

### III. Breakfast at the Campsite

A. As all of this begins to sink in, Peter, in zealous and almost delirious joy, puts *on* more clothes and *then* jumps into the water to go see Jesus. When the rest arrive at the shore, Jesus invites the entire group back to his campsite where he has been cooking over a charcoal fire. “Come and have breakfast,” he invites them. However, my hunch is that when Peter saw this fire, breakfast was the last thing on his mind. For, the fire would have looked just like the charcoal fire around which Peter had been standing to warm himself when he had denied knowing Jesus three times (Jn. 18:18 – the only other time we see this word for “fire of coals” in the NT). Was Jesus making a cruel joke at Peter’s expense, rubbing his denial in his face? Gratefully he wasn’t. Just like the question about not having caught any fish, Jesus was offering Peter, as the chapter continues, the chance to think differently, and the chance to be reinstated as one who loved Jesus and wanted to care for his sheep. At the table of Jesus, even at a picnic table by a fire at a campsite, Jesus offers his healing grace.

B. And for the church here’s the point. We can only go forward when we allow Jesus to free us, through the forgiveness of his table, from our past, destructive memories and actions, and when we then look to Jesus to direct us and nourish us through the equipping ministry of the Holy Spirit. Unless we wait actively upon him in prayer, seeking his voice to direct our mission and his nourishment to sustain us, we’ll work all night and catch nothing, not getting much done of what God wants done and exhausting ourselves trying to do it.

As I think about this text in light of our annual meeting this Thursday, it seems that in a few areas of our life together, our nets are not as full as we’d like them to be or think they should be. In the realm of our budget, our children’s Sunday school, and our Sunday morning worship attendance, for example, we yearn for more.

But there are also areas of great fullness, especially in our mission to the hungry through Open Door, the homeless through Family Promise, the hurting through Divorce Care, and the hospitality we extend to one another through our small group gatherings.

So as we seek to discern what God has ahead for us, may we be willing to wait and listen, not mindlessly or as an excuse to do nothing, but prayerfully with expectation, relying on the One who alone has the wisdom and the power to enable us to partner with him in the mission of his church.