

Fish on a Charcoal Fire

Devotional

Scripture Reading: John 21:1-17

The town where I grew up, Tellicherry in Kerala, is situated alongside the Arabian Sea. My house was just two kilometres from the beautiful beach. The school I went to, St. Joseph's, stood on a cliff, or high-rise, overlooking the sea. Throughout the beach, there used to be villages of fishermen. People who earn their living by fishing are some of the hardest-working people you will ever come across. They are up before the sun and set out for the day's catch regardless of the weather. At times they are in the deep sea through the night. But if you ask them if they would rather do something different for a living, they will look at you and say, "Never in a million years." Fishermen love to fish.

Jesus wants us to go fishing! We will look at it another time.

Several of Jesus' followers were fishermen, including Peter. When he put down his nets to follow Jesus, he also gave up his lifestyle and his profession. He did that not knowing what he was getting into; he did that without a second thought; he did that much before he found out who Jesus was.

That is why it is interesting that in John 21 we encounter him back out on the water, fishing. On the Saturday following the Friday Jesus was killed brutally, Peter must have decided to put his Plan B into action. Surprisingly, he did not change his mind after witnessing the Resurrection of Jesus. Some scholars believe that after Peter's three denials of Christ (Mark 14:66-72), he felt he had placed himself out of Jesus' inner circle and therefore retreated to his former occupation. My own, non-scholarly, view of the matter is that, like everyone else, Peter did not yet understand Jesus. Peter certainly did not expect that Jesus would pursue him to talk about those courtyard denials. Jesus never gives up on anyone; that includes you and me. As I write this, I know that He is knocking on the door of my heart. I know He wants to share my grief for my son. My heart is at rest now.

Going back to our passage for today, the miraculous catch of a multitude of fish immediately caught Peter's attention (John 21:6-7). He knew Jesus was back again, standing on the beach and directing his operations. You will find Jesus at unexpected turns in your life. And when you do, remember that He is not there merely to give you an epiphany. He is there on purpose, for you.

What caught my attention in the passage is the charcoal fire burning where Jesus was standing. I see this as a reminder to Peter of his rejection of Christ (John 21:9). The only other time the word for charcoal fire, anthrakia (Strong's Concordance, G439), is used in the New Testament is at the scene of Peter's denials (John 18:18). After their meal, Jesus turned to Peter. He asked Peter how much he truly loved Him (John 21:15a). Peter's declaration of loving the Lord three times did not erase his three denials of just days before. However, it did create an avenue for a deeper relationship with Jesus. With each question, Jesus was giving Peter another chance.

While Peter the fisherman would finally retire, Peter the follower of Jesus, the rock on which Jesus built His Church, would never turn back again.

No matter how many times you did a nose up and turned away from the Lord, He is always standing on the shore of your life calling you back to Himself. Are you ready to truly follow Him?