

This passage has caused some difficulty for scholars. The issue is this, when you have the climactic conclusion to chapter 20, why on earth would you want to continue in the way of chapter 21? However, that debate is best left for scholars, the reality is the chapter is in the fourth gospel and so we have to deal with it.

As it sits in the gospel it serves as a nice bridge between the appearance and command of Jesus in the upper room to wait, and the final commissioning of the disciples for the world wide mission they are about to embark on. However, all that said, the main purpose of the passage is to convey to us how Jesus is revealed to his followers.

While it seems odd that in the light of the disciples seeing Jesus in the upper room and having the Holy Spirit breathed on them they would go back to their old ways, in reality they could not just sit and do nothing. They were practical men. They needed to be doing something and fishing was what they knew best at this stage. It does also give us a clue to the fragility of the early movement. This was really touch and go at one point.

The whole story has the air of two great gospel stories. The original call of the disciples, and the feeding of the 5000.

As in the original call of the disciples they were fishing at night. In Johns gospel night has many overtones. It was at night when Jesus was resurrected. It was night when Nicodemus comes to Jesus. Jesus talked about walking at night as if without knowledge and daytime would come and all would be revealed when confronted with the news of Lazarus' death.

It could be that the John is trying to make the point that the disciples are still uncertain as to what the future holds for them. Even in Acts as the disciples accompany Jesus up the mount of Ascension they still doubt and they show by their questioning of Jesus they still don't understand what the resurrection means for them. As in the original story they toil all night, but catch nothing.

With the dawning of a new day Jesus stands before them. Now as then they do not know who he is, and now as then he tells them where to find a catch of fish. By their obeying his word to them, even though they do not know who he is, they are rewarded with a great catch of fish. Jesus tells them to cast their net. In the context of Jesus making them fishers of men, when you cast your net you are not sure who you are going to get in it.

What is made clear by this passage is that it is not our efforts that are going to bring people into the kingdom, but the actions of Jesus. We are necessary, for we cast the net, but God provides the fish, or for our purposes the people to be enclosed in the catch.

In the original story Peter says to Jesus, go away, here when told that it is the Lord, he immediately casts himself into the sea to swim to shore, even though he would not have been a strong swimmer. What a transformation the Lord has brought about Peter, although, he is still slow to understand, and still impetuous when he realizes what is going on!!

When they get to the shore they find breakfast being prepared for them. What has gone on before has remembered the setting for the original call of the disciples, now we move on to the recollection of the feeding of the 5000, and even the upper room last supper.

A few interesting points to note in the story.

First the net is not divided. The word that is used is schidzo. It is the word we get schism from. Split, division. In the context of the fourth gospel we need to remember that this is probably written towards the end of the first century. From John's epistles we see that there was probably division in the community. The reference to the great shoal of fish, even the number, tends to give rise to the possibility that what John is on about, is that when evangelistic efforts are undertaken you don't know who is going to respond and come into the community of faith.

God brings the people in, not us. We cast the net, but God provides the pond to fish in, and the directions about how we fish. When this occurs a great catch is the result. What that will do is place great strains on every aspect of community life. It is hard for the disciples to bring in the catch, it will be hard for those in leadership to manage the situation, but they will be able to do it together. The great number will provide a huge strain on the community, especially resources and people, but the community will not be torn apart by it.

The second aspect of the story reminds us of the feeding of the 5000. There a young lad provided the bread and fish for Jesus to bless and distribute. Here, although there is some fish on the fire already, they are told to bring some of what they have just now caught to the meal.

This is what we do in the Eucharist. We bring the offering of our labours to the Lord, and he returns it to us as sustenance for our journey of faith. This is how Jesus is revealed to us. When the two disciples on the day of resurrection on the way to Emmaus talked with Jesus they did not know him, except in breaking of bread. When he meets with them here, he gives them bread and fish to eat. While they know he is the Lord, they commune with him, and are fed by him, in preparation for their missionary journey.

We too can know the Lord just as the disciples knew him in this story. We know him by listening to him and obeying him. He may be a shadowy figure in the distance, but that does not stop us from heeding his word. We respond to him as a community of faith, as the disciples responded to him in that boat. We can know him within the community setting when we engage in the communion meal. Jesus takes our offering of bread and wine and transforms it into food for our journey of faith. He is truly present and he feeds us as we require.

Finally he calls us to be an evangelistic community. We have to be willing to cast the net. We need to be willing to get in with others and labour for the lord. We

are not asked to do it by ourselves. There were seven disciples in that boat that night and morning. All that was needed to bring in the catch of fish. We need to put ourselves in sufficient numbers so that we can do what God is asking of us to do here in Gordon. We do this confident that God himself will give us clear directions of what we need to do, so we have to be listening. When we listen and obey the results will be amazing. We also need to remember that while we may be placed under significant strain we will not be put at breaking point. Our evangelistic efforts will stretch us but they will not cause us to be torn apart.

We can only achieve all this by being a faithful community of faith, praying regularly, receiving the body and blood of Christ in communion and as a community and by faithfully responding to the commands of Christ.