

Well, Easter has come and gone for another year. The Lord has risen. After His resurrection from the grave, Jesus appeared numerous times to His disciples and others over a forty-day period before He ascended back into heaven to sit at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. Even though Jesus tried to prepare His disciples for the Resurrection; it still caught them by surprise. Jesus told them time and time again that the Son of Man must be handed over to the religious leaders, be crucified, buried, and rise from the grave on the third day. But they just didn't get it. Look what happened on Easter morning. The only ones who were up were the women, and the only reason that they were going to the tomb was to make the final burial preparations for Jesus' body. They never expected to find the tomb empty or to meet the Risen Lord.

However, once they found the tomb empty and had been informed by the angels that Jesus had risen, the women rushed back to tell the disciples. Luke tells us that at first the men didn't believe the women, so what's new; they had to go to the tomb to see for themselves before they would believe. Peter and John ran to the tomb and found it just as the women had told them. Luke also tells us that Peter went away wondering to himself as to what had happened; while the Gospel of John notes that Peter and John after seeing the empty tomb went back home. They still didn't fully understand the wonder of this miracle of God's grace.

It appears that the disciples were having a hard time grasping this concept of the Resurrection. So how did they handle this situation? This morning let's see how Peter and some of the disciples dealt with this dilemma. Our text for this morning is taken from the 21st Chapter of the Gospel of John, the first fourteen verses.

Read John 21:1-14

I love fishing. It was the one most enjoyable thing that my brothers and I did with our dad growing up. We had a five-acre pond on our farm outside of town that we went to every Sunday right after church. If the preacher wasn't finish by 12 noon, Dad was. Someone said that since three-fourths of the earth's surface is water and one-fourth land, it's perfectly clear that the good Lord intended that man spend three times as much time fishing as he did plowing. Then there's the bumper sticker: "Work is for those who don't know how to fish!"

A man saw a young boy fishing without permission on his private lake. As he approached the boy, he said: "This lake is clearly posted with No Fishing signs. So why are you fishing in my private pond?" "I'm not fishing, sir," the boy politely replied, "I'm just teaching these worms how to swim!"

Now I have always found this story in the Gospel of John to be interesting. After all the events surrounding the Day of Resurrection with the news from the women and the race to the tomb in the morning, the appearance of Jesus that evening to two people on the road to Emmaus, the appearance of Jesus in the Upper Room even though the door was locked, and Thomas' doubting and then his profession of faith, look what the disciples did next. Peter says: "I'm going fishing, anyone want to come along;" so seven of the disciples went fishing. They returned to their old way of life as if they had been laid off from being disciples.

With all that was happening, why did they suddenly decide to go fishing on the Sea of Galilee? You know when life gets too overwhelming to handle, hanging up a sign on the Upper Room door saying "Gone Fishing" might not be a bad idea. I know that I have done it several times, especially when I worked in Atlanta. When things got hectic around the office, my friend Andy Hughes and I would take a few hours off and go fishing on a nearby lake. We settled a lot of the world's problems sitting in a boat on that quiet lake.

Maybe that's what Peter and the others were doing. Things were happening so fast that they just wanted to get off to a quiet place to sort things out. And of course, fishing was a comfortable place for Peter and most of the disciples since that was how they had made their living before Jesus called them to follow Him.

But this brings up another possibility – were they running away from their responsibilities. The Resurrection and everything that was happening were in some ways beyond human imagination. The disciples might have been scared of what was going to happen next, or especially, what Jesus might ask them to do next. A lot of times we crawl back into our comfort zones to avoid taking on new responsibilities and ministries; we don't like change!

Or maybe they were like a lot of Christians today; they were just taking a break. After all Jesus had done all the work; He had defeated death and the grave promising eternal life to all who believe in Him. In addition, He had taken all the sins of the world upon His shoulders on the cross making it possible for our sins to be forgiven, even today. So, what else is there to do; let's go fishing and relax!

Now you may be thinking – where is Reuben headed, what's the key point? Well, the two most important days for Christians are Christmas and Easter. Everything leads up to these two days of celebration. The four weeks of Advent prepare us for Christmas and the forty days of Lent prepare us for Easter. This year there are 268 days between Easter and Christmas, and unfortunately, a lot of people go fishing or take a break from church and spiritual growth during this time.

The time after Easter can be anticlimactic for some people. You know, we have gone to the Sunrise Service, sung the great old songs like "Christ, the Lord Has Risen Today" and "Up from

the Grave He Arose,” put on our best Sunday clothes, listened to the long-winded preacher, hidden the Easter eggs for the kids, and had dinner with the family. In addition, it’s spring time and we have a lot of things to do around the house. Then we need to start planning our summer vacation. We just don’t have time for God and church right now; after all we did go to church on Easter; there’s plenty of time for Christ later. Our health is good and everything is going okay with the family, so we really don’t need God right now. We’ll just take a little break from Him until something comes up when we need Him again. Ever felt that way or know somebody with that attitude?

There’s also the assumption that since Jesus Christ has already done everything to secure our salvation, we don’t have to do anything else except sit back and believe in Him. Once we believe, we are saved; you know the theology, once saved always saved. Well, theologians have debated for years the term “backsliding,” which means the lessening of one’s Christian commitment; in other words, taking it for granted and not living up to the responsibilities of being a Christian. But as Christians we are called to grow in Christ each and every day, and become more like Him in our thoughts, words, and actions.

The old hymn that we will sing later entitled “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing” was written by Robert Robinson when he was twenty-three years old. The third verse goes: “Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love.” Unfortunately, this verse came to represent Robinson’s later life when he drifted from God. While riding a stagecoach one day, Robinson heard a woman humming his hymn. She later engaged him in conversation and asked what he thought of the hymn. Overcome with emotion, he replied: “Madam, I am the poor unhappy man who wrote that hymn many years ago, and I would give a thousand worlds, if I had them, to enjoy the same feeling I had back then.” That’s a sad statement, but it happens when we take a break and drift from the Lord. Since we are all “prone to wander,” we need to keep each other from the danger of backsliding and taking a break from the Lord.

Hebrews 2:1 states: “Keep a firm grip of what you have heard so that you don’t drift away.” Nothing in this world is easier to do than drifting. Of course, no person drifts upstream, only downstream. It is so easy. All you have to do is sit back and relax and let the boat go. You are soon lulled into a lazy daze, not caring where you are headed. You may not even be aware that you are drifting until it is too late and the boat hits the rocks. The devil is very wise. He seldom urges a Christian to leave the church or to give up their faith in the Lord. Instead, he causes us to relax, rest on the oars, and drift along in the Christian life.

Have you ever seen a commercial or comic strip where a guy has the devil standing on one shoulder and an angel on the other with each one trying to tell him what to do? Maybe Peter had the devil on one side and Jesus on the other. The devil was whispering in Peter’s ear to take it easy; this resurrection stuff was just a one-time mystery; there’s nothing else to do; you

are saved, don't worry about the rest of the people, I'll take care of them. Remember this was not the first time that the devil had whispered in Peter's ear. In Matthew 16, Jesus tells the disciples that He must suffer, be killed, and raised to life on the third day. Peter then took Jesus aside and criticized Him telling Him that this must not happen. Then Jesus uttered those famous words: "Get thee behind me, Satan!" Maybe Peter was listening to the advice of the devil once more when he took the disciples fishing.

And this might be why Jesus suddenly appeared on the shore of the Sea of Galilee to give fishing advice and to cook breakfast for the disciples. And it just might be why the disciples didn't initially recognize Jesus; they had their worldly sunglasses on and not the glasses prescribed by Jesus. Jesus knows the human heart and how the devil operates, so He goes to remind the disciples and especially Peter of their calling. As you read this morning's text, you can almost hear Jesus praying: "Please, Father, I need to be with them one more time to help them understand that they must keep on going even though I am no longer with them physically. Let them grasp the seriousness of their commitment this time." After breakfast, Jesus takes Peter aside and restores Him with love and gives Him his commission to "Feed My Sheep." From that day forward, Peter never looked back or listened to the whispers of the devil again.

As a church are we listening to the whispers of the devil? Ever since the beginning of time and especially after the Resurrection, the devil has not let up trying to disrupt the building of the kingdom of God. The devil will do anything, I mean anything to hinder and stop us from telling others about Jesus Christ and bringing them to accept Him as their Lord and Savior.

And believe me the devil is in every church and religious organization. On Halloween one year a man dressed up as the devil in a red outfit with horns and a tail. As he was headed to a party, it started to rain so he ducked into the nearest building which happened to be a church. Well, when the people saw him in that costume they started running for the exits. One lady got her purse caught on the pew. The man approached her and tried to calm her down, but he was out of breath from running. The lady in fear said: "Satan, I have been a member of this church for thirty years, but I've been on your side the whole time."

Do you know what the devil's favorite church is? Is it a Methodist church, Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Catholic, or Episcopal? No, it's the Complacent Church - the church of convenience, the church of criticism, the church of inward thinking, looking only after itself and the next fellowship meal with no outreach, no witness to the community, and a place where the word evangelism is considered a dirty word and not spoken. And if we are not careful, we can lose our focus and become a Church of Complacency. The devil is out there whispering: "Easter is over, take it easy, there's plenty of time before Christmas, you go ahead and rest. I'll take care of things." All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing!

Now as a Christian, going fishing is not bad; it just depends on what we are fishing for. In both the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, when Jesus calls Peter and his brother Andrew to follow Him, He tells them that He will make them fishers of men. In our text this morning, it appears that Peter and the other disciples have temporarily forgotten what their primary mission was and had drifted back into their comfort zone, their old way of life. Jesus comes to remind them why He had selected them as His disciples and what He expected of them.

My friends Easter may be over, but God still has a lot of work for us to do here in Rio Rancho. Let's not drift back into our comfort zones, and let's not listen to the whispers of the devil. God is giving us many opportunities to reach out and serve this community through the Pantry, Feed New Mexico Kids, St. Joseph Mission School, assistance to Pastors Chris and Joanne, and to reach out to our friends and neighbors who don't have a church and have not accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Let's get off our Blessed Assurance and do something! Let's go fishing for the Lord! Amen