

ZIONSVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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"BREAKFAST ON THE BEACH"

JOHN 21:1-14

Have you ever written a mission statement for your personal life? A mission statement shares what we believe to be our reason for being and is a guide for determining what we do with the time we are given to live life on this good planet earth.

In the movie, *Jerry Maguire*, the character Jerry Maguire, played by Tom Cruise, is a greedy sports agent, who has a dark night of the soul and changes his reason for doing business and thus the way he carries out his job. He writes a mission statement resolving that agents should be less concerned about money and more concerned about the lives of their clients. After being fired for his convictions, he lives out his beliefs through starting his own company.

On that ominous night when he wrote his mission statement, Maguire is in his room, unable to sleep, having a crisis of conscience. As the narrator he says, "I couldn't escape one simple thought. I hated myself. No, here's where it was. I hated my place in the world."

Maguire then slouches down on the floor with a faraway look in his eyes. "I had so much to say and no one to listen." He turns on his laptop computer. "And then it happened. It was the oddest, most unexpected thing. I began writing what they call a mission statement. Not a memo, a mission statement, a suggestion for the future of our company.

He begins to type. "A night like this doesn't come around very often. I seized it... Suddenly I was my father's son again. I was remembering the simple pleasures of the job, how I ended up here out of law school, the way a stadium sounds when one of my players does well, the way we were meant to protect them in health and injury. With so many clients, I had forgotten what was important.

Today, we are going to look at another dark night of despair, experienced by 7 men many years ago. In an amazingly effective manner, their mission statement was given to them. As I read John 21:1-14, consider the fact that this last chapter of John's Gospel, as was true for the last words of the other gospels, is to commission the disciples to carry out the mission God had for them.

Read John 21:1-14

EVEN THOUGH PETER AND SIX OF THE OTHER DISCIPLES HAVE ENCOUNTERED THE RISEN LORD, THEY RETREAT TO THEIR PAST AND THE FAMILIAR. VERSES 1-3

The previous post resurrection appearances of Jesus took place in the Garden Cemetery or the Upper Room, both in Jerusalem. Probably, a couple of weeks have passed since Jesus last appeared to His excited, yet, bewildered disciples. They all believed that He had done the unthinkable, the impossible- raised triumphantly from death to life. The problem for them, in this new reality, could have been that He had not appeared to them in some time. What's more, there were no assurances that He would appear to them again. After all that had happened, they desperately needed for Him to be with them. They weren't sure what they were supposed to do. What were their marching orders? Was He going to set up His kingdom in a military or political way? While they are given more instructions in Acts 1, just before His Ascension into heaven, at this juncture, there must have been a sense of uneasiness about what was going to happen next.

All or most of the disciples have returned to their home country of Galilee. They would be safer there in those familiar surroundings, considerably north of Jerusalem. Never one to wait around for anything, Peter seems to take the initiative. He simply says, "I'm going out to fish." 6 of the other disciples say, "We'll go with you."

Some would think that it was a kind of therapeutic respite or "R and R" for them doing what they knew best. It would be a good physical workout giving them the chance to work out some of the kinks in their bodies caused by the extreme stress of what they had gone through since Good Friday. They knew Galilee well and it would be so good to be out here on its usually peaceful waters doing what they knew best.

Others would say that it was much more than that. Peter was going back into the fishing business. He had a family to feed. When he signed up with and followed Jesus, he never dreamed it would turn out like it had. For all kinds of reasons, in Jesus' absence, he feels like a failure. The three year time with Jesus was merely a detour, now he had to get back to business. He's starting all over and this is his first day of business.

This week, on Tuesday, when I usually work on the text and prepare what I am going to say on Sunday, I went to a pastor's meeting previewing an event which is going to take place next April when Billy Graham's daughter, Anne, is going to be speaking for a couple of nights at the Convention Center. As a part of that meeting, Joe Stowell, a former pastor, now author and university president, spoke to us on this very passage. I couldn't believe it. You can bet that I let it soak in. Joe was convinced that Peter felt like a failure and in his frustration and pain, gave in to the pull to return to his old life. This was his first day back in the fishing business. He had waited long enough.

While we might think of Peter as being impatient and fickle, maybe we aren't too different. We may have experienced God working in our lives in miraculous ways in the past, but somehow the joy of following Him has been squeezed out of our lives by bewildering, anxious happenings we never expected. The fire of the passion we felt, when we first experienced Jesus working in our lives, seems to have grown cold. The mission statement we once lived by as we faithfully followed Jesus, somehow seems like past history in light of the present.

We have waited long enough for Jesus to show up again. We're going fishing! Sound familiar? Is that you, today? Has your faith gotten stale? Are you running on the fumes of past experiences with our Lord?

AT THE END OF A LONG, DARK NIGHT, JESUS, THE RISEN LORD, ENCOUNTERS THE DISHEARTENED DISCIPLES. VERSES 4-8

In verse 4, we are told simply that "Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the beach, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. " As was true from Jesus' birth, in all of His encounters with people, He comes as "Emmanuel," "God with us." Once again, Jesus stepped into their world and situation in life, meeting them where they were. They may have not known where to find Him, but He could always find them. Even though only 100 yards off of shore, through the early morning mist or fog they may not have even seen Him. If they did, they did not recognize Him.

They also don't recognize Jesus' voice when calls out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" It's a rhetorical question to be sure. He knows that on this first day of their new business, they have been skunked. Night fishing is one of the best times to cast their nets in those waters. They know Galilee and where the good places are to catch the most fish. Yet, in utter failure, they have to answer the voice from the shore with the simple, "No," even though they have been at it all night long.

It kind of reminds me of the time I went fishing with the Outdoors Editor of *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, who was a member of the church I served in St. Louis. He was hoping to do a feature article on how even a novice pastor can catch fish on one of Missouri's wonderful rivers. Well that article never happened. Just like the disciples, even

though with his great expertise we tried everything, we caught nothing. Probably so that he could rationalize “expensing” the trip, he wrote a sentence about our fishless adventure at the end of a column a couple months later.

Jesus shouts out instructions to the disciples, “Throw you net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” Some scholars have conjectured that from his vantage point Jesus could see a school of fish there in the opposite direction from where they had been casting their net.

At first they may have thought, “Who does that stranger think he is to tell us how to fish?” But that thought soon melted into, “What have we got to lose if we cast once more on the other side of the boat.”

You know the story. They cast on the right side and caught so many fish, that their net could barely hold them all. When John sees what has happened, he looks to the shore and finally recognizes that “It is the Lord!” Peter, the ringleader of this new fishing enterprise, is so caught off guard when He recognizes Jesus that, that he responds in a typically impetuous fashion. Stripped down to his shorts, like most fishermen when they are working, he put on his outer cloak and jumps in the water moving toward Jesus. Probably, he put on his cloak out of respect for the Master. The other disciples follow in the boat pulling the net full of fish with them.

Again, like Peter and the other discouraged and disheartened disciples, Jesus seeks us out, rekindling the fires of passion within us once more. Maybe we don’t recognize His appearance or His voice, but that doesn’t stop Him from encountering us in our areas of deepest need. Frankly, maybe we have left behind the mission statement which we once followed and in our impatience have taken off on our own. It doesn’t deter Jesus. He knows our potential and is not going to let us go.

FINALLY, IN VERSES 9-14, JESUS RENEWS THEIR CALL AND VIVIDLY EMBODIES HIS MISSION STATEMENT FOR THEM.

Peter and the others had to remember the incident in Luke 5, at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, when the crowds were so large that he got into Peter’s boat and taught the people amassed on the shore. When He had finished teaching, He asked Peter to put out into the deep and let down the nets for a catch.

Peter responds by saying that they have fished all night and have caught nothing, but since it’s Jesus asking, he’ll do what he asks. When they let down the nets, they catch a large number of fish. Jesus has met them on their own turf and has given them a sign that speaks so loudly to them that Peter falls on his knees realizing that he is a sinner. The rest of the disciples also amazed at the wonder of what Jesus has done.

It’s at this point that Jesus says to Peter, “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will catch men.” Peter and the others pull their boats ashore and begin to follow Jesus.

Do you see how the memory of his call from Jesus must have come screaming back to Peter as Jesus recreated the wondrous event just when Peter seemed to be going back to his old life? There is a sense in which Jesus was renewing that call just at the very time that Peter most needed it.

Next Jesus vividly embodies their mission statement for them if they are going to be His followers. Much like He did when He washed His disciples’ feet in the Upper Room before the Passover celebration, Jesus tenderly serves a sumptuous breakfast on the beach to these discouraged, disheartened disciples. Just as Jesus has tenderly served them by meeting their needs and nurturing them, their mission is to do the same.

So what’s happening here? Peter and the other disciples are being called to be fishers of people and the net is large enough for all kinds of people. They win people to a faith in Jesus by meeting their needs and nurturing them, just as they saw Jesus do time after time. That’s their mission statement as followers of Jesus.

Next week we will talk specifically about how Jesus zeros in on Peter at the end of that breakfast on the beach.

APPLICATION

In my mind this encounter with the Risen Lord has great ramifications to you and me, especially if we are disheartened and doubting our mission. Jesus, the Risen Lord wants to renew our call and mission to follow the example of Jesus in caring for the needs and nurturing people all around us each day.

Maybe these words from Australian, John Dickson in his book, *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission* will serve as an example of what that looks like in our world today:

“Under God, my own conversion was the result of one person’s willingness to embody the mission of the ‘friend of sinners.’ ...One of the relics of Australia’s Christian heritage is the once-a-week Scripture lesson offered in many state high schools. ...One of these Scripture teachers---Glenda was her name--- had the courage to invite my entire class to her home for discussions about God. The invitation would have gone unnoticed except she added: ‘If any anyone is hungry, I’ll be making hamburgers, milkshakes and scones.’ ...As I looked around the room at all my friends—all skeptics like me—I was amazed that this woman would open her home (kitchen) to us. Some of the lads were among the worst ‘sinners’ in our school: one was a drug user (and seller), one was a class clown and bully, and one was a petty thief with a string of breaking and entering charges to his credit.

I could not figure Glenda out. She was wealthy and intelligent. She had an exciting social life married to a leading Australian businessman. What was she thinking inviting us for a meal and discussion? At no point was the teacher pushy or preachy. Her style was completely relaxed and incredibly generous. When her VCR went missing one day, she made almost nothing of it, even though she suspected (quite reasonably) it was someone from the group. For me, her open, flexible, generous attitude toward us ‘sinners’ was the doorway into a life of faith. As we ate and drank and talked, it was clear this was not a missionary ploy on her part. She truly cared for us and treated us like friends or, perhaps more accurately, like sons. As a result, over the course of the next year, she introduced several of us from the class to the ultimate ‘friends of sinners,’ Jesus.”

As we gather around this table, if you haven’t done so recently, ask God to renew your call and mission to care for the needs and nurture the people in your sphere of influence.