

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
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John 21:1-14

Trust the Guide

Hymns: 168 – 148 – 151 – 155

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way: ² Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ³ "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴ Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. ⁵ He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. ⁶ He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

⁷ Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. ⁸ The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. ⁹ When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught."

¹¹ Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?"

They knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.
John 21:1-14

"Just trust the guide," the guy's buddy had told him as he recommended a guide for his upcoming fishing trip. It had seemed like easy advice to follow when he had first heard it. But each part of this trip was making it more difficult. The guide had assured him of a bigger prize as they drove past lakes filled with anglers and waded through mountain streams that he knew to be filled with fish. The guide had urged him forward as they hiked through valleys and climbed over hills. And finally as this guide told him to put away his expensive equipment and fly, the doubts were high. But his friend had repeated the advice so many times, it had brought him so far already, he couldn't stop now. So as he grabbed the rod given him by the guide and he began to cast, he actually muttered the words, "Just trust the guide." And within minutes, the man was shouting "Just trust the guide!" with joy as he netted his prize fish.

One of the great struggles that people have in life comes when they are asked to put aside both pride and doubts, and to do something in a different way than they normally would. Yet "*Trusting the Guide*" is exactly the advice that we are given today as we look at the fishing story given to us in John 21.

If you were with us last week, then you might remember that we were focused on the account just preceding this one in the Gospel of John. In that account which took place on the evening of the first Easter Sunday, we found the disciples of Jesus terrified and huddled together in a locked room. The disciples were now at least out of the locked room after that first appearance from the resurrected Lord, but it is clear that they were still uncertain as to what they should be doing.

And what do people do when they are uncertain in life? They often return to what they know. John tells us that for seven of the disciples that meant returning home to Galilee, where they had grown up; where many of them

likely had families; where they had once made their living as fishermen. And as they were bumming around in their hometown, Simon Peter announced to the others, "I'm going out to fish."

Though it had been about three years since they had given up their learned profession, these men hadn't forgotten how to fish. They knew the "right way" to do things: the right equipment, the right spots on the Sea of Galilee, the right time to fish. But John tells us "that night they caught nothing."

It was then early in the morning as the men were coming in that a man appeared on shore and he had some advice for these experienced fishermen. This apparent stranger told these men who had just been working all night to throw their nets over, right where they were, and he promised a catch. Experience and/or cynicism could have led these men to think that if they hadn't caught any their way, this way wouldn't be any better, but they listened anyways.

And what happened? They caught such a large amount of fish, the number so astounding that John actually remembered that it was 153 and they struggled to haul them in. These men who had been doing it the "right way" all night long found success when they trusted the guide who told them to do it "his" way. They now had a fishing story for the ages.

Of course, they had something much more too. As soon as the nets started to fill up in this amazing and unlikely way, John knew. "It is the Lord!" he exclaimed as Peter jumped in the water and rushed to shore. And Christ who had once called them from these same waters to leave their boats and become "Fishers of Men" certainly had a higher purpose in mind than just showing them that he was a master angler.

That purpose was actually described for us in the opening words of this section. In verse 1, John wrote these introductory words, "*Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples.*" The appearances of Jesus after the Resurrection are somewhat of a mystery. It seems that Jesus only appeared occasionally, and even then, unexpectedly, and we don't know where he went in between appearances.

Often times, he would hide his appearance, but he always appeared bodily, in the flesh. We do know that these appearances were for very specific purposes. In the locked room, it was to give assurance of his resurrection and security. Here, it was different.

Though in form, this might have seemed like many of his other miracles, which were done to prove that he was the Son of God. This miraculous catch of fish was not done to prove who he was. The disciples had no doubts that Jesus was God; they didn't need further proof. So what was the point?

Well, it was getting closer and closer to the time when Jesus would again call these men to leave the comfort of their homes and fishing boats. And he would send them out to go fishing in some strange places. He wouldn't just send them to the familiar spots that they knew and to people that were like them. Rather he would tell them to cast the Word in places like Turkey and Italy, to do their work among foreign people in Africa and Asia. And he promised that there in those places, their ministries would find success.

And so this lesson that fish weren't always found in the logical places using the routine methods was a reminder as they went out spreading the Word as Fishers of Men. Would they trust the Guide?

Every one of us knows how easy it is to question the requests of our Guide, Jesus Christ. As we look to the guiding advice that he gives us in his Word, it is often straightforward, isn't it? In this situation he advises, "Ask, seek, knock." In that moment of trouble, he urges, "Do not worry." To this person, he says, "Preach the Word." With that person, he says, "Love unconditionally."

Our Guide is often straightforward in how he tells us to deal with problems and to live with people, but so often we simply don't trust the Guide. Jesus says, "Pray when trouble comes," and we say, "It's pointless; it won't change anything." Jesus says, "Trust during this moment of hardship," and we say "There's no way this could possibly be for my good." Jesus says, "Keep loving your spouse," and we say, "The relationship's beyond repair." Jesus

says, "Share my Word," and we say, "There is no way they will believe."

We often seem to have an answer as to why we shouldn't trust the Guide; a reason as to why the way that he gives us in his Word couldn't possibly work.

Instead, we rely on our own ways and solutions. We follow the ways that seem "right" to us. We fish where we think best. And we often come up empty and frustrated.

Whenever we struggle to *Trust the Guide*, let's listen to what John exclaimed about this man standing on the shore. Trust the Guide, because "It is the Lord!" Those disciples would have done anything that Jesus told them to do because they trusted him. They saw the depth of his love for them as he suffered and died. They were given assurance of who he was by his resurrection from the grave. They could trust his promises because he showed them that he had the power to keep them. They knew he would guide them in their work just as he did that day as they fished. He would bring them success as they moved to fishing for souls.

We too, can have every confidence as we look at our guide and exclaim, "It is the Lord!" It is the Lord who cared so much for us that he suffered and died. It is the Lord who rose from the dead. Through his work, he has given us forgiveness and life. Through his resurrection he has given us assurance in who he is. And as he guides us in life, we can trust his words of promise because they are backed by the power to keep them.

Our guide often tells us to do it a different way; to go against the norm; to defy reason; to do it differently than our flesh and the world would tell us to. In every situation, trust the Guide. Because it is the Lord, and he has given us every reason to trust where he tells us to fish.