

THE MIRACULOUS CATCH OF FISHES

Rev. B. David Holm

Lesson: John 21:1-13

Perhaps you know the Easter story well. It is certainly a story that brings real joy to us, for it is a story of life itself. The Lord had been crucified on Friday, but He truly conquered death on that first Easter Sunday so long ago. He rose from the death of the sepulcher to stand before His followers, fully alive and recognizable. As Risen Lord He proved to them that there is no actual death, and, more importantly, He proved that He was God in *Human Form*—God with us.

Do you remember how confused the women were who came to the sepulcher, early in the morning, and found it empty except for the linen clothes? The angels told them that the Lord was not there, but He was risen. Then the Lord Himself appeared to them. Imagine their joy—their Lord and Master, whom they loved and followed, was not dead, but alive! The women ran to tell the disciples that the Lord was risen, but the disciples did not really believe this until Easter night when the Lord appeared to all of them through closed doors. Then they truly believed that their Lord had conquered death and was still with them.

It was very important that those who had followed and loved the Lord should know that He was alive and visible. In no other way could they truly believe, after seeing Him die, that He was God Himself. So that they could be absolutely sure of this, the Lord appeared to them—not once or twice, but many times. And not just on Easter day itself, but a number of times for forty days after Easter. Nor did he appear to them just in Jerusalem. He sent them to the Sea of Galilee to the north. Our lesson from the Gospel of John tells us of one very important time that the Risen Lord appeared to them there, at the Sea of Galilee or the Sea of Tiberias, as it was sometimes called. This happened some days after Easter.

The disciples had gone to Galilee to wait for the Lord to show Himself to them again. Most of the disciples had their homes in Galilee. Some of them came from the little fishing villages on the shores of the lake or sea. Seven of the disciples were together there: Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathaniel, John, James and two others whose names we are not told. Simon Peter said to the others, “I am going fishing.” The other six agreed to go, also. Right away they got into a little ship and sailed out onto the lake.

They fished all night with big nets, but caught nothing—not even one fish! You see, they had been fishing in the way that was usual in that day. They threw the big net over on the *left* side of the ship, holding on to it with ropes and letting it drag behind the ship like a big open bowl. The idea was that as the open net dragged behind the ship the fish in the water would get caught in it. They threw it on the *left* side of the ship so that their strong *right* arms could drag the net back into the boat. All night they kept throwing the net into the water, letting it be pulled by the

ship for a while, and then dragging it back on board. But when morning came, they had not caught any fish.

In the early morning light, they saw a man standing on the shore, but did not know who it was. Do you know who this man was? Yes, it was the Lord, but the disciples did not recognize Him. Perhaps it was not light enough yet. The Lord called to them, for they were not far from shore. He asked, “Children, have you any food?”—meaning had they caught any fish. They answered, “No.” Then He told them to do something very unusual. He told them to throw their fishing net on the *right* side of the ship—the opposite side from what was usually done. And they obeyed, even though they didn’t yet know who the man on the shore was. They threw over the net on the right-hand side of the ship, and immediately it was filled with a multitude of fishes. This was a great miracle, and only the Lord could have done it. The disciple, John, knew this, and he said to Simon Peter, “It is the Lord!”

When Peter heard this, he put on his fisherman’s coat, and jumped into the water and swam to shore where the Risen Lord was. The rest of the disciples came to shore in the little ship, dragging the net full of fishes behind them. When they came to shore, they saw a fire of coals with a small fish cooking on it and some bread. The Lord told Peter to bring in the fish they had caught, and he hauled the net to land. It was full of big fish—one hundred and fifty-three of them. Even though they were so big and so many, the net was not broken—another miracle. The Lord then invited the disciples to eat, and He served them bread and fish.

There are many things we could say and learn about this interesting and important story. Today, there is time for only one important lesson from it. Why did the Risen Lord tell them to throw the net on the right-hand side of the ship? What difference did it make which side they fished from? It makes a great deal of difference when we learn what the “left side” means spiritually, and what the “right side” means spiritually. Only in the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church are we told what these two sides mean, for in the Heavenly Doctrine we are given the spiritual or heavenly meaning of the stories in the Word.

The “left side”—the usual side to fish from—means trying to do things from our own power instead of from the Lord’s power. Sadly, this is what we often try to do. We think that we can do and learn everything from our own strength and cleverness. In our foolishness, we forget that all strength and intelligence comes from the Lord. We take credit for it, and we may even become conceited and boastful. If we do this, we tend to forget the Lord and depend just upon ourselves.

Many people are like this. They forget the Lord and depend upon themselves. They throw the net of their minds on the left side of the ship of life. Such people may be successful in worldly things, but what heavenly or spiritual things do they catch? Nothing at all! In the darkness of their spiritual night their net (mind) remains empty. They might learn to *know* things about the Word and religion, but they can’t receive the *love* of the Lord and the neighbor which the Word teaches and

which is the *life* of religion. From their own work alone, they can gain nothing of the *Lord's* good and truth.

But how, then, can we gain the real things of the Word and religion? The first step is to listen to the Lord as He tells us to throw the net of our mind on the *right* side of the ship. This means that we must admit—humbly admit—that we can learn the real things of heavenly life only from the Lord—from His goodness and wisdom as given in His Word. We must depend on the Lord for these things and not on ourselves. Now, this does not mean that we have no work to do. We have an important, although humble, part to play. We must cast our net into the water. We must earnestly go to the Lord's Word and study and seek for His truth and good there. If we do this, then the Lord will fill our mind with great and holy truths which are joined with good, just as He filled the disciples' net with one hundred and fifty three great fish.

But we have one more great task to do. We must bring the filled net to land. We must bring these great truths into our life. We must use them in serving and obeying the Lord and in loving and helping our neighbor. When we do this, then a wonderful thing happens. The Lord invites us to eat, and He serves us. He invites us to be nourished by His good and truth, meant by the bread and fish which He supplied for the disciples. When this happens, then we are truly His followers and part of His Kingdom.

Now, you might ask what this interesting story has to do with Easter. The answer is clear. Only the Risen Lord of Easter could have done this great miracle. True, while He was still in His earthly body, He had performed many miracles. But this miracle of the amazing catch of fish stands for something He prepared for during His whole life on earth. It tells us the reason why He was born on earth and why He rose from the dead. He did all this because He came to fill people's minds and hearts with His love and wisdom. Only by becoming love and wisdom in a Human Form, which would always be with us, could He fill our minds with the presence of His truth and lead us to His good. Only the Risen Lord can fill the net of our mind from His great power and lead us to His nourishment. This is the very meaning of Easter. It is the story of what the Risen Lord can do for us—the Risen Lord who is with us at this very moment, telling us to humbly cast our net on the right side of the ship and come dine with Him.

Amen.