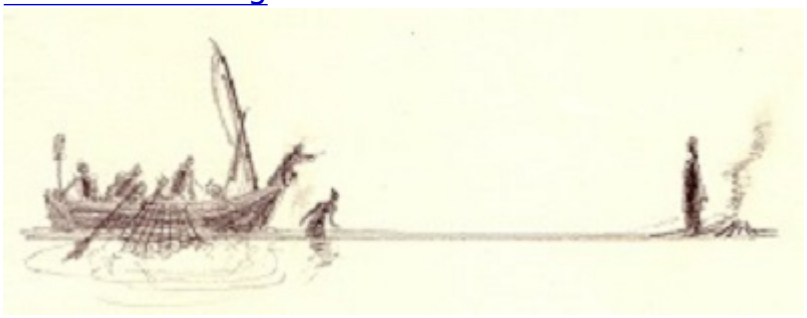
Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“Jesus revealed himself in this way” (John 21:1).

Acts 4:1-12; *Jn 21:1-14*

If Chapter 21 of the fourth Gospel serves as a kind of coda, it reviews many of its basic themes: the leadership of Simon Peter, the church’s universal mission to

incorporate new members, the centrality of forgiveness and reconciliation, the eucharistic meal, and the core mystery of the crucified and risen Jesus.

The story suggests that the main body of Jesus' disciples — seven of the original 12 -- retreated to Galilee after the events that occurred in Judea. At Simon Peter's urging, they take up their former livelihood of fishing on the Sea of Tiberias. They fish the whole night and catch nothing.

At dawn, a stranger calls from the shore, asking if they have caught anything. He tells them to lower their net on the other side of the boat, an absurd suggestion, but it results in a huge catch of fish. The catch hearkens back to another incident in Luke 5, when a similar catch occasioned the call of a reluctant Peter, who knelt before Jesus confessing his unworthiness to be a disciple.

The focus of the story is again on Peter, who, when the disciple Jesus loved says, "It is the Lord," leaps into the water and wades ashore. The stranger has prepared a charcoal fire, and he takes some of the catch to cook a breakfast of fish and bread. For the last appearance story in the New Testament, this one retains a sense of mystery: "None of the disciples dared to ask, 'Who are you?' because they knew it was the Lord." Their mixed reaction describes the early church's slow progress in coming to faith. They come to faith by remembering the events of Jesus' life and by celebrating the Eucharist, where they experience Jesus present with them at table. (See Luke 24:28-32).

The charcoal fire links the reader to the scene in the courtyard of the high priest, where Peter denied knowing Jesus. Peter will undergo a triple confession of love to counter his triple denial of Jesus, and he is then commissioned to shepherd the church when Jesus tells him, "Feed my lambs, and feed my sheep," as a sign of his love.

This Gospel is packed with connections and an invitation to grasp the larger meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection as God's gift of redemption. We will do this if we persevere in faith even in times of failure and discouragement, when we fish all night and catch nothing. Jesus, our crucified and risen Lord, is never far away, and always eager to reveal himself to us.

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