

## *Fishing on the other side*

*Revelations 5:11-14; John 21:1-19*

*It's been a long night. It's been a long night, and a lot of hard work, and nothing to show for it all. Peter's idea of going fishing tonight seemed like a good idea. Things have been so messed up over the last couple of weeks. So many ups, so many downs...it's been a whirlwind of emotions messing with us all. So going fishing seemed like a good idea. Going back to something we know, something we're good at; something that requires more effort and less thinking. Throw the net. Wait for a while and work together to haul the net back in. The net is empty, so haul up the anchor, row the boat to the next spot, and throw it again. Think about the net and keeping it spread properly – not the loss of a friend and mentor. Think about rowing the boat to the next stop where I know we will find fish. Don't think about this amazing return from the dead. Use your back, not your mind, and life seems so much easier. Returning to what we know is much simpler than dealing with what we don't. It's been a long night, but the dawn is starting to glimmer to the east, and we are slowly making our way to our usual landing spot. It would be nice to get back on land; sit down together and have some breakfast and ease our sore backs and arms. Perhaps some quiet conversation, and then some sleep – glorious sleep to free the mind. I'm not sure who that is on the beach or what he wants. If he is looking for fish, we are the wrong boat to be asking. We have nothing. We are throwing the net one more time...really? But we were throwing off the wrong side. The other side, as he told us to. Not sure what we are trying to prove. Not sure how or why. But the net is full – too full, for that matter. Good thing we are so close to the beach. We need to pull this harvest in, as the boat will never take the weight. Who is this, and how did he know?*

It was a long night. We are creatures of habit, for better or for worse. It is what the majority of people are. We take comfort and feel secure within routines that are familiar. It's just how so many people are wired. We see it everywhere around us: on the job, with our friends, worshipping together on Sundays. Am I the only one who heard the disciple on the back of the boat say, "But we always fish from that side." I watch members of the congregation leave for something so small as changing to a different version of *The Lord's Prayer*. It seems strange to me, but obviously important enough to them to move on to somewhere else.

In some ways, I understand the attraction to routine. Our working week is filled with challenges and changes that are out of our control, but we still have to deal with them as part of our job. Job

pressures and challenges seem never-ending. It's nice to come to church where you're pretty sure things are the same and surprises are at a minimum. We like to have stability in our lives.

The past two years of the pandemic have certainly stuck a rod in the spoke of our lives, hasn't it? Who would've suspected that out there lurking was an event that was going to turn our personal, family, and working lives completely topsy-turvy? Despite reading the papers and watching the news, I suspect I dwelt in denial. Canada was not going to be hammered by this virus. Other countries, yes, but not here. After all, we are a first-world country with hygiene, clean water, food, ample supplies of toilet paper. We would be spectators and helpers in my mind.

I was wrong. It has been a very challenging time and many people have been hurt badly by it all. The isolation and closures of restaurants, gyms, theatres and bars have caused great distress among many. The rise of video conferencing and learning new ways to talk to people without actually being with them has been part of that very steep learning curve we've all been part of.

It also severely disrupted our routine and work for many: rise, eat, work, commute, eat, commute, work, eat dinner. Those meetings have never seemed to end, with brainstorm sessions with colleagues and coffeetime chats. Petty rivalries and good-natured ribbing: all those things we took for granted and complained about were blown away by the pandemic. The actual lockdown meant we had to change to continue earning our daily bread and bringing home that bacon. Working from home became the new norm for many people. For a while, you couldn't find a headset or a webcam anywhere to purchase, as the rush happened and employers scrambled to supply their employees with the tools needed to continue their work from the dining room table.

Employers also scrambled to find ways to confirm their employees were actually working. The fear that employees would not actually work while in their homes brought in a rise of monitoring systems that would actually track your smallest movements and keystrokes for people that were working remotely. There was also a rise in webpages explaining ways to spoof these measures, and pretend to be working while bosses were looking over your shoulder virtually.

But surprisingly, it turned out people could and would be more productive when away from the watchful eyes of their bosses. Reports of productivity gains refuted the old ideas of how people had to be managed. Turns out that removing commutes, dress codes, and strict timelines encouraged people to work hard, and challenged them to find new ways to do their work in this new virtual world. Sometimes change can be a good thing.

Now we come to the hard part as we return to "normal". Some companies are demanding their employees return to the office – return to normal again. Many employees are refusing to return. They like what they were doing and have no desire to return to the office environment. And there's a shortage of workers, it seems, so the battle is on for companies to bend to accommodate the people they have, rather than try to find new, all due to this pandemic.

COVID-19 has proven much of our entrenched thinking to be wrong on many levels. Workers who were once considered unskilled or menial were soon elevated to hero status. Supermarkets raise their employee pay as they continue to come to work and to try their best to keep the shelves full and checkout lines moving. Who knew toilet paper could be so elusive, and that unfounded rumours could produce panic and hoarding situations? The workers who man the drive-thrus of our favourite fast-food places were also hailed as heroes, willing to go to work so people could get that cup of coffee they desperately craved.

The world shutdown also broke ideas on the environment and on our dependency on oil as a driving force. It showed now that our market really depends on consumers, and they could be the ones driving the bus. Himalayas were once again viewable on a clear day. The Venetian Canals were clear once again. Air travel at a bare minimum reduced pollution and ended the hoards of tourists who travel far and wide, sometimes straining nature's ability to heal itself. It also proved how much damage humans can do in their search for that special vacation we feel we deserve and are told we deserve in the endless parade of advertising.

Perhaps we need to look at the pandemic in another light. It forced us out of our ruts, out of our routines, out of our safe places, and really forced things to change. Change is hard, but change is what we need to shift our focus and our desires and look at doing things in a new way. Jesus was change. The driving force that shook the halls of power right down to their roots. An itinerant carpenter who went out in the community and showed people that things could change. That poor people were important, and there was always time to sit and eat with those who were considered outcasts or shunned by the rest. He would even talk and listen to women. He challenged the status quo and was crucified for it in the end.

He certainly didn't come to tell us to remain in our comfortable routines and safe places. Peter attempted to return to his old routine: his life as a fisherman, and tried to take the others with him. As the scripture said, "Simon Peter said to the other disciples, 'I'm going fishing. And they said, 'We will go with you.' And got into the boat.'" But that meant they caught nothing.

Reverend Miller from BC writes, "How quickly we are tempted to return to what we have known, to what is familiar and comfortable. The disciples have already been commissioned, and spirits sent into the world to bear witness to the risen Jesus. But Peter's instinct is not to embrace a risky resurrection. A newness is to try and fit that newness into what he had already known. Mercifully, Jesus will have none of it. Easter is not just a celebration of the resurrection and a renewal of our beliefs in faith. It's a challenge to embrace the resurrection as our own and to go out into the world and tend the sheep. To care for our fellow beings to the best of our abilities. And to break out of our stifling routines and accept challenges placed before us, every day. Amen.