

Is it any different with us? Confirmands, for you? Like the disciples, won't you find your purpose in life in living for the One who lived, died, and rose for you? Won't you echo the words of the Apostle Paul: *"He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Cor 5:15)?* Just as Jesus was present with his disciples on an ordinary day by the Sea of Galilee, so he promises to be personally and powerfully present with you in all the ordinary things of life that you do every day.

Like counting fish. I've always wondered who counted all those fish—153 of them. What a tedious task it must have been. [Mention picking up 91 tablets from bathroom floor.] Aren't you glad that someone took the time and put forth the effort to count all those fish? And aren't you glad that now it's part of the inspired record of God's Word, a little detail included by the Holy Spirit, that leads you to put your faith and trust in Jesus? I pray that such is the case. For with accounts like our text today, Jesus reassures you that he is with you now and will be with you always.

My dear confirmands, with our schedule here at St. Paul's, Confirmation Sunday always lands during the Easter season. That means that you and I still live in the victory of the open and empty tomb of Jesus. Our lives are dead to sin and alive for Jesus, because Jesus died for us that we might live for him. ____, may you never forget that the Lord Jesus, who lived, died, and rose for you, is now personally and powerfully with you according to his promise and purpose. Let the journey begin at the open and empty tomb of Easter! Journey with Jesus in a new, an exciting, and a forever friendship! Amen.

John 21:1-14 (Confirmation) – *The Journey* – 294, 599, *By Faith*
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A youngster was playing outside one day, when his mom called him in for dinner. As he was sitting down to eat, she asked to see his hands. They were filthy. "Young man," she said, "how many times do I have to tell you to wash your hands before you eat? They're full of germs. Go and wash up right now." The boy got up and, while walking to the door, could be heard grumbling under his breath, "Germs, germs, germs! That's all I ever hear around here, and I've never seen any of 'em."

Can't we who are Christian say the same of many of the things in which we believe? Who of us has ever seen Jesus? Or an angel? Or heaven? Scripture is right when it says, *"Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see" (He 11:1).* Isn't that why Jesus appeared so often and to so many after his resurrection—to assure them that he was risen and alive? And isn't that why he appeared to the disciples in our text today? Didn't he want these former fishermen to know that he had something far better in store for them than their old way of living?

So also for you confirmands. While today is a big day for you, the day when you'll publicly profess your Christian faith and promise lifelong loyalty to Jesus and his Word, it's going to be so easy for you to revert to past patterns, many of them spiritually unhealthy ones, especially if your dads and moms and families are not 100% supportive of you in your lifelong journey with Jesus. Today, then, with your eyes focused on the open and empty tomb of Easter:

Journey with Jesus in a New Friendship

- 1. Jesus is personally with you according to his promise.**
- 2. Jesus is powerfully with you according to his purpose.**

1. Why do you think that some of Jesus' disciples had returned to Galilee to fish? It had been such a tense and tumultuous time for them. So much had happened in the weeks leading up to our text. They had seen Jesus ride triumphantly into Jerusalem. They had watched him cleanse the temple and clash with the religious authorities. They had agonized over his arrest, his trial, his crucifixion, and his burial. Then came his resurrection. They had been on an emotional roller coaster. It all took place so fast and with such intensity that their heads must have been spinning. Perhaps all they wanted was a normal, ordinary day, when they could do something familiar and enjoyable. Why not go fishing—back home in Galilee, where Jesus had told them to wait for him?

So that's what they did. And it was there, at the Sea of Galilee, the sea they knew so well, that Jesus appeared to them. *"Early in the morning,"* John writes, *"Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples didn't realize that it was Jesus."* And a bit later, *"Then the disciple whom Jesus loved"* (that's John) *"said to Peter, 'It's the Lord!'"* It really shouldn't surprise us that Jesus knew what his disciples needed and met them exactly where he had promised.

One day a little girl was walking home from church. A passerby met her and asked where she had been. She replied that she had been at church, learning about God. The man didn't think much of church—or of God, for that matter—and figured he'd teach her a lesson. "Young lady," he said, "I'll give you \$5 if you can tell me where God is." Without batting an eyelash, the girl countered, "Sir, I'll give you \$10 if you can tell me where God isn't!"

Like that man, we so often fail to recognize that God is present in our lives. We tend to view life as nothing more than a dog-eat-dog existence, a survival of the fittest, as it were, where the best man wins. Like it or not, that's sin. And for that we need to repent. For all sin, regardless of how it shows itself in our life, is rebellion against God, and God says, *"The soul who sins is the one who will die"* (Ezk 18:4). But it was for this reason that Jesus came into the world: to undo what sin had done. *"The reason the Son of God appeared,"* God says, *"was to destroy the devil's work"* (1 Jn 3:8).

And when God raised Jesus from the dead early on Easter Sunday, he was announcing to the world that from now on things would be different. That's why Easter changes everything. That's why you and I can count the risen and living Jesus into the equation of life. The psalmist had it right, when he said, *"The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth"* (145:18).

Confirmands, Easter is God's guarantee that Jesus is with you every day and that he'll give you the strength you need to face every situation in life. Jesus is with you in a very special way when you gather with others to worship him, as you are today, for he promises, *"Where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them"* (Mt 18:20). Jesus loves it when you lend him your ear and listen to him as he speaks to you in his Word and comes to you in his Holy Supper. Use your Bible and find devotional materials that you enjoy. [Mention personal Bibles and *Meditations*.] And Jesus longs to have you speak to him in prayer. Not only does he listen, but he promises to answer you in the ways that are always best for you. As you journey with Jesus, open your hearts to what he says to you in his Word and pour out your hearts to him in prayer.

It's a sad fact of life that many of the friendships you enjoy today—with your classmates and neighborhood chums and fellow confirmands—will not last. That's the nature of human friendships; they're only temporary. But Jesus promises to be your Friend forever. That's why he says to you, *"Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"* (Mt 28:20). And why he says, *"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you"* (He 13:5).

Without a doubt, the risen and living Jesus is personally present with you according to his promise. And he is powerfully present with you according to his purpose.

2. John writes, *"[Jesus] called out to [his disciples], 'Friends, haven't you any fish?' 'No,' they answered."* Jesus' question rivets the disciples' attention on the fact that their return to their former way of life has been a dismal failure. Whatever their reason for going out to fish that day—R&R, avoidance, escape—all their professional skills and expertise have produced absolutely nothing. They've spent an entire night fishing, and their net is empty. They've been skunked. In short, without Jesus, they could not and would not be blessed—a powerful lesson for all of us to learn.

But Jesus powerfully provides for them beyond their wildest expectations. He says to them, *"Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some."* Think of it. These are experienced fishermen; this is their occupation. This stranger on shore (they still don't know who he is) stands a good football field away from them, and *he* tells *them* where to fish. They've toiled all night (the best time to fish, by the way) with no results. Logic says, "Cut your losses and go home." Experience says, "Pack it up and get some rest." Jesus says, "Just cast the net on the other side of the boat." With nothing to lose and everything to gain, they cast caution to the wind and their net into the sea. And the result? *"They were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn."*

How this miraculous catch of fish must have taken these men back to a time three years earlier, when Jesus first called them to be his disciples. How they must have realized now that the same power that brought about this miraculous catch of fish would empower them to be fishers of people. I would imagine that these men never again fished for fish, but spent the rest of their days telling anyone who would listen, *"God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact"* (Ac 2:32). The disciples were now ready and willing to go into the world, proclaiming the gospel with courage, and suffering everything for the sake of Jesus.