

# Listen to Me



One of the things that was interesting in college was figuring out which

professors wanted what when it came to assignments. And it was more than just a matter of reading the syllabus or the grading rubric because certain things can't be conveyed in a rubric and can only be learned by being a part of a theology department with six professors in the department. One professor wanted students to parrot back something they had heard during lecture, bonus points if it was something the professor said rather than something we read in the book. One professor wanted students to synthesize class readings and information to the lecture and support an argument that was made during class. One professor wanted to know what we really thought, even if it disagreed with the professor or something we read during the class. If I ever tried to use the wrong strategy with the wrong professor, it could be the difference between A-work and C-work, and yes, that is the voice of experience talking. Even though I disagreed with how this was, it just made life easier to do it the way we were “supposed to” and turn in the paper.



Today, we're continuing our series on the post-resurrection appearances

that John tells us about in his gospel all in the pursuit of trying to figure out what it means to live in the light of Jesus' resurrection, kind of like trying to figure out the difference between a Dr. Bender paper and a Dr. Gregg paper. It's different. Life because of Jesus is different; it has to be. Like I said last week, our lives, because of Jesus, are permanently marked and forever changed by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We talked last week about what it means to believe, today we look at what it means to listen. What does it mean to listen to Jesus? What changes for us

because we have heard him speaking or we've read something in the gospel and it has us shook?

As I said last week, in the Gospel of John, Jesus spent a great amount of time with his disciples teaching and reminding the disciples of all they'd been through and learned together. He appeared to them twice in that locked room where Thomas eventually made his great confession, and in our scripture today, Jesus appears to his disciples on the shores of the Sea of Tiberius. And each time Jesus shows up, Jesus is reminding his disciples (and all of us who now call ourselves disciples) that we've been called to live this wild and wonderful life we've been given for Jesus.



**It's interesting to me that in our scripture today, we find the disciples**

entering a new stage of grief. In an attempt to make their world make sense again after being seemingly obliterated, Peter tells the disciples that he's going back to something he's used to, something that's comfortable, something he can probably do while he allows his mind to wander and try to process his next steps: he's going fishing. So, a number of the disciples go with him, and the scene is set for another of Jesus' great lessons even on this side of resurrection.

The disciples, many of whom are experts in this particular field, fished all night with no luck. And then all of a sudden, out of nowhere, a voice from the shore cried out: "Do you have any fish?" Defeated and dejected, the disciples said, "No." And the voice cries back, "Have you tried casting nets on the other side?"

I preached this text a few years ago at a conference youth event and had the privilege of being able to talk to an actual fishing expert during the message. Before he was a pastor, Charlie Moore had a fishing show on ESPN. So, we read this passage, and

heard the moment when Jesus told the disciples how to fish. I asked Charlie, a literal expert, what would happen if someone tried to tell him how to fish or where to try fishing, and without missing a beat, Pastor Charlie said, “I’d throw them off my boat.” I don’t know how the disciples reacted; maybe they reacted how Pastor Charlie reacted. Or maybe they just said, “Well this might as well happen.”



**But either way, they had a choice: they can either listen to the advice of**

this stranger or not. They can either cast the nets as he’s said or pack it in for the night. They can either listen or they can’t. It’s the same choice we face: we can either listen or not. We can either seek out the word of Jesus by reading the gospels and living its light or not. We can either seek the very heart of God in prayer or not. And it may mean that we have do in fact do something different or believe something different or even view someone differently.

This is sometimes how life works. And we might not like it; we may think our way is actually better (and in the case of the papers I wrote in college, I may have been right). It’s different in our scripture today, though, because the person giving instructions is not an esteemed and beloved professor, but the Risen Jesus, the son of God, and the disciples learned once again that doing things his way, listening to his words and acting upon them, is going to be their life-long pattern, even as they tried to return to their normal lives.



**The disciples choose to listen to the voice of the stranger on the shore**

and it changes everything. The haul they brought in that morning after an entire night of futility is nothing short of miraculous. John tells us that it’s 153 fish and that the nets were in danger of ripping under the weight of the catch. The beloved

disciple recognizes that it must be Jesus, for only he could make such a grand catch happen. In the face of the disciples seeming ready to throw everything out, wanting to go back to doing things their own way, the disciples are reminded what it means to listen to Jesus, what it means to do things his way. The disciples were heading back to their lives as usual only to be reminded that their lives will never go back to normal. Peter and Andrew, James and John will not be returning to their family's fishing operations.



Looking at this opens up the space we need to decide what it means for

us to listen to Jesus in this Easter season? Will we write the paper like the professor we're writing for or do it our way? Will we throw the net on the other side of the boat or insist that we're the experts? Will we listen to Jesus or not? It's my hope and prayer that you will hear Jesus' words either in print or in prayer and be compelled to hear and to listen. And then stand back and watch what happens next. It may very well verge on the miraculous.