

The Park Road Pulpit  
*Sermons from Park Road Baptist Church*  
Russ and Amy Jacks Dean, Pastors

**P.S.**  
**John 21.1-19**  
**April 25, 2010**  
**Amy Jacks Dean**



Scholars generally agree that John's Gospel probably ended at chapter 20. The speculation is that some redactor, some later writer came in and added this last chapter. The ending of chapter 20 is clean. The writing style of chapter 21 is a little different from the rest of the chapter. So one of these experts suggests that chapter 21 is a lengthy P.S. It's a postscript. It's almost like an afterthought. The Gospel begins with those most poetic of words: *In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the word was God . . . and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth.* And then the writer takes us through some of the extraordinary events of the life of Jesus even though the writer of John has a very different style than the other Gospel writers. But even in John's Gospel, the story culminates with the last week in the life of Jesus including the Triumphal Entry and the Last Supper and the Garden of Gethsemane and the Crucifixion and, finally, the empty tomb – full of wonder and hope and fulfilled promises. The end. Love, John. Oh . . . and P.S. – something really weird is going on. Jesus is dead, the tomb is empty and there's this really strange feeling that Jesus is still with us. His memory is still very much alive and reports are that people would swear that Jesus is still among them. So, the best way I know to tell you about this is P.S. - Jesus cooked breakfast for the disciples after he was dead. That band of faithful followers (who ended up not being so faithful in the end) had found a way to go on with the routine of their lives in the midst of their deep grief because that's what you have to do. And even though he was a carpenter by trade, Jesus had some fishing advice for the guys that landed them 153 fish, and he added some of

those to the breakfast grill. And then he gave Peter a chance to redeem himself by asking him three times – *Peter, do you love me?* Three times. Of course, Peter had denied even knowing Jesus three times so he was awfully glad to get a chance to set that record straight. It's all pretty strange and bizarre, but that's the story as I hear tell it. Now The End, for real.

Back in the old days when letter writing was the main mode of communication, the postscript was often the little nugget of truth or the forgotten detail or the comical relief. Now letter-writing is simply a lost art. Whatever is written is written in abbreviated code with no complete sentences or thoughts and no one has the time for a P.S. because we hit "send" too soon. But this P.S. in John's Gospel is pretty important. Here's how I picture it: All night long the disciples had been putting their nets out on the left side of the boat. They threw the nets out and pulled them back in . . . empty. Threw them back out and pulled them back in . . . empty. They did this over and over and over again until their arms were burning with exhaustion and their backs were aching. As day began to break, they began the process of cleaning up and calling it a night. After some rest and some food, maybe they could come back out and try again. Just as they were in the process of completely giving up, they hear this voice. They are just far enough from shore that they have to squint to see if they can make out who is calling to them, but they can't tell who it is. But you know how voices travel on water. Though they don't know who it is, it is clear as a bell what he said. He said *cast you nets on the other side*. Now here's where I picture the disciples saying, under their breath, of course, because you know how voices travel on water – they surely must have said something like – what a quack! What difference could changing sides of the boat make? This guy has lost his mind. Maybe we should try the other side of the lake or another little cove, but there's no way the distance of the width of the boat will matter one iota. I'd love to know why they tried it. To get the guy to shut up? Because

they were just that desperate to try something so ridiculous? Whatever the reason, they cast that net on the right side of the boat and they hauled in a load. 153 fish to be exact. And the nets didn't even break. If there were ever a P.S. that was worth it, this was one. And in that moment, John recognized the guy frying up fish on the beach. And Peter – well, this next line has always been distracting to me, but I try to get over it – Peter put his clothes on, because he was fishing naked, and jumped in the water and swam to shore to greet Jesus – for it was only after the big catch did they recognize Jesus in their midst.

So listen to this P.S. – for most folks it's not a total overhaul that is needed; for most folks it's not an "about face" that is needed; for most folks it's not major change that's needed. For most folks, God answers with a slight nudge to not give up, a little call to make a small adjustment, and some advice that's more like tweaking. Just try a little something different. Make this one little change. Why is that so many times, people do the same thing over and over and over again and then wonder why they are getting the same results? Throw the nets out the left side of the boat and get nothing in return. Repeat. Repeat again. It looks like someone in that boat would have said, "Maybe we should mix it up a little." But no. They keep casting the net off the left side of that boat and grow more and more frustrated that nothing changes. This isn't rocket science. And yet in the little boats called your life and my life, we get stuck in the same kinds of ruts that those disciples did. Stuck in the same old ruts. Practicing the same old bad habits. Wanting change. Wishing for change. Needing change. But unwilling to try anything new that might bring about change. Unwilling to tweak our schedules or change our priorities, we keep casting off the left side of our boats and coming up empty. And then wondering why?

Well, friends, P.S. – why don't you try this one little thing: why don't you cast the net off the right side of your boat for a change and just see what happens. Are you not taking care of

your body? Created in the image of God, are you self-destructing? Maybe you need to go to bed an hour earlier and get more rest. Maybe you need to stop eating so much junk and commit to putting healthy food into your body. Maybe you need to take 30 minutes out of your day and exercise. If you are able, try walking in your neighborhood and notice beauty – the flowers, the birds, the people. Why don't you cast the net off the right side of your boat for a change and just see what happens. Are you not taking care of your soul? Created in the image of God to be in relationship with God, are you dead inside? Maybe you need to open up the Bible and read it for yourself. Start with a Psalm or a parable. Maybe you need to stop the babbling of your prayers and just sit and listen – quiet your inner being and receive the still small voice of God that is always trying to break through and connect to us. Why don't you cast the net off the right side of your boat for a change and just see what happens. Created in the image of God, are you feeling overwhelmed? Maybe you need to practice saying no to one thing that is filling your life with busyness and yet bringing no meaning to your life or to the work of the Kingdom. Or maybe you need to say a resounding YES to something bigger than yourself. Maybe you need to focus on someone else – just one someone else – one afternoon or evening this week: visit someone who is alone or cook a meal for someone who is sick or give some food to someone who is begging on the street corner and do it without judging them. What could it do for your life to do something for someone else without questioning their motives or background?

Why don't you cast the net off the right side of your boat for a change and just see what happens. Now there are some folks who truly need such an overhaul in their lives that they need to fish in a completely different lake. They need to make radical changes to find health and wholeness and healing. But it is a rare person that can do that in one fell swoop. It's why Jesus starts with a small suggestion – something that is doable and reasonable. And that one small

change in the disciple's action brought in a huge catch. But the catch of fish was not the point of the P.S. of John's Gospel. The point was that in making the slight change, they recognized the guy on the beach cooking fish. The point of the P.S. is to remind us that the sacred and holy is always standing on the shore preparing a little fish-fried breakfast for us. Unfortunately, we often only recognize that after we haul in the big catches. We get too mesmerized and distracted with the big catch of the story – for fish tales are always so exaggerated. This is an extended postscript where the punch line isn't about catching the fish but more in the conversation between Jesus and Peter. *Do you love me? Yes. Then take care of my people. Do you love me? Yes. Then tend to the needs of my people. Do you love me? Yes. Then do something.* Jesus didn't get much more specific than that for specifics would have been too overwhelming. That conversation was more like *cast your net on the other side of the boat and just see what happens when you love me.* Feeding, tending, caring – that's bound to bring in a big catch. May it be so.

Oh, and P.S. I've stood on the beach that is the traditional site of this resurrection appearance. That little section of beach has a small church dedicated to this story and a statue of Peter and Jesus together. That beach area was within walking distance of the retreat center where we were staying. So one day I walked there in the afternoon and I could hear it in the distance. It was a tune that I knew well, but the words sounded different. I couldn't understand the words for the men were singing in Spanish. But I didn't need to understand the words to know what they were singing. They were singing the song I had hummed everyday that I had gone down to the water's edge to put my feet in the Sea of Galilee. "You have come down to the lakeshore seeking neither the wise nor the wealthy. But only asking for me to follow." This choir of Spanish men belted it out in that small church. I stepped into the back of the sanctuary and I belted it out with

them – an American woman singing English with about 25 Spanish men singing it in Spanish –  
and I tell you the truth – I believe I smelled the fish frying. The End.