

Served by the Lord, Again!

Easter 3

Pastor Josh Frazee

John 21:1-14

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

We have nothing to give God. For one thing, God created everything. It all belongs to Him anyway. From the beginning of our lives to the end, we are given life. In the same way, all that we come to own in it is not ours to keep. God gives us the things that we possess to be stewards of them. So we begin with nothing, we live with nothing, and we depart with nothing to take with us.

It seems to be God's nature to start with nothing and then give. Everything we know, from the trees to the animals to outer space to the core of the earth, was all created from nothing. God simply gave the Word, and it all came to be.

Secular society would have us look to our own strengths and talents, to make the most of ourselves and make a name for ourselves. And in terms of serving our neighbors, we might then use everything we have been given and try to do the best that we can with them. But that is the last way we would want to approach God.

Luther wrote a lot on this topic. He compared us to spiritual beggars, which is an apt way of considering our position before God. To demonstrate this, consider the account of the two men praying in the Temple. The one was a Pharisee, one of the spiritual elite of his day. He had been given much, and he thanked God for it. The problem was, he thanked God for it in comparison to others. He bragged about his own spiritual growth, as though it somehow made him more righteous before God than someone else—like that tax collector over there.

We would do well, then, to follow the pattern of that tax collector. He recognized that he was nothing but a beggar before God. He had nothing to offer. No exceptional talents, no praying seven times a day or week—He wasn't even looking up to heaven. All he could confess, and rightly so, was that he was a sinner in need of forgiveness. He, Jesus said, went home forgiven. That's right, the beggar, the one who admitted to having nothing before God.

This morning we'll continue thinking about our nothingness and God's nature to give, as we find Jesus meeting His disciples in Galilee, just as He had told them.

1

Verse

Upon hearing the word of the women, the apostles did go to Galilee. While they awaited the Lord's next instructions, Peter decides to go fishin'. The other disciples agree to go with him. "They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, 'Children, do you have any fish?' They answered him, 'No.'"

Did you hear that? "(T)hey caught nothing." They spent an entire night waiting for some fish, but their nets were completely and utterly empty. Then, to top it all off, some guy on the shore called out to them to see how they had faired, and they could only reply they had caught nothing. Not a single fish!

How often do you feel as though you have nothing to offer? Perhaps you never feel this way. You might be a pick-myself-up-by-the-bootstraps kind of person. You might have a variety of talents that you enjoy sharing with others. But before God, that kind of attitude will only get you into serious trouble. Perhaps, though, the season of Lent showed you your position before God. You might truly and rightly understand and

confess that you are nothing—nothing but a poor miserable sinner who can only cry out to God for His forgiveness.

Lent may be over for the year, but the lesson remains. We have nothing to offer before God. He owns it all, and what we do have and use is all tainted with sin. We find ourselves with the disciples only able to answer the Lord that we have nothing. While the disciples were not aware of who it was that was calling out to them, we may also not always be aware of it when God is showing us just how nothing we have, or just how nothing we are. And that means that the time is ripe! It is the perfect time for the Lord to step in and do His work. The situation is right for God to reveal His power and presence in ways which we cannot imagine. After all, do you think the disciples had any clue what was about to take place in their lives?

2

Verse

When His disciples had acknowledged that they had nothing, Jesus “said to them, ‘Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.’ So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord!’”

Where there was nothing, Jesus gave more than could be handled. With a simple word, He directed the disciples to lower their nets, and instantly the net became so full that it could barely be brought in. When this occurred, first John and then Peter realized it was the Lord Jesus who had called to them from the shore. They knew only He could offer such a powerful word—the same powerful word He had used in calling them from their lives as fishermen.

As with Jesus’ disciples, when we hear the Word of our Lord, we find that it does powerful things. When we hear the Word to do this or to stop that, as from the Ten Commandments, our hearts immediately convict us. The Word is spoken, and something happens. But what is more, when our hearts and consciences convict us, we hear another Word from our Lord—His Words from the cross: “Father, forgive them” and “It is finished.” Just as quickly as our sins convict us, we hear Jesus speak and we know that our sins are totally paid for by His blood.

Jesus gave up everything for you. And then, to borrow an idea from the president of Concordia Seminary St. Louis, Jesus retired. He packed up everything and moved to Galilee. He slept in for a few days. He was getting ready to tell His disciples that they could take it easy now, right?

No, St. John records a different account for us. Even after giving it all up on the cross, Jesus appeared to His disciples a couple of times, and then met them again here at Galilee. Once again, our Lord served His disciples. Upon their confession that they had caught nothing, Jesus gave them fish; and as they returned to shore, the disciples found that Jesus had a charcoal fire going so that He could prepare breakfast for them.

3

Verse

As soon as John points out that the one on shore is Jesus, Peter puts on his outer garment and swims to shore. The others quickly follow, dragging in the net of fish. “When they got on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, ‘Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.’ ...Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast.’ Now none of the disciples dared ask him, ‘Who are you?’ They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.”

No, Jesus did not retire. Instead, He served His disciples again. He gave them food to eat. This morning, He continues to serve. He has provided this table with bread and wine for you to eat and to drink His body and blood. In this way, He gives you the salvation He procured at the cross in physical, and spiritual, means.

Nothingness may be the absence of anything, but it is also the best state in which to meet your Lord Jesus Christ. Out of nothing—the nothingness of sin and no good works to present to Him—He provides you with all that you need for this body and life, and the next. In Jesus' Name. Amen.