

# **“God’s Fish Story...For Real”**

## **Eastertide Season**

LaPorte New Church Swedenborgian

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May 1, 2022

### **Scriptures**

Psalm 30:1-8a

John 21:1-19 (selections)

### **Hymns/Songs**

“Come Thou Fount of Ev’ry Blessing” 82

“Come and Find the Quiet Center” 477

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KA2MQynGle4>

“The Servant Song” 620 (vs. 1,2,6)

### **Children’s Message**

#### **Psalm 30:1-8a**

I will extol you, O LORD, for you have drawn me up  
and have not let my foes rejoice over me.

<sup>2</sup> O LORD my God, I cried to you for help,  
and you have healed me.

<sup>3</sup> O LORD, you have brought up my soul from Sheol;  
you restored me to life from among those who go down to the pit.

<sup>4</sup> Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints,  
and give thanks to his holy name.

<sup>5</sup> For his anger is but for a moment,  
and his favor is for a lifetime.

Weeping may tarry for the night,  
but joy comes with the morning.

<sup>6</sup> As for me, I said in my prosperity,  
“I shall never be moved.”

<sup>7</sup> By your favor, O LORD,  
you made my mountain stand strong;  
you hid your face;  
I was dismayed.

<sup>8</sup> To you, O LORD, I cry,  
and to the Lord I plead for mercy....

#### **John 21:9-19**

#### ***Jesus Appears to Seven Disciples***

<sup>9</sup> When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid

out on it, and bread. <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." <sup>11</sup> So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. <sup>14</sup> This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

### **Jesus and Peter**

<sup>15</sup> When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." <sup>16</sup> He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." <sup>17</sup> He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. <sup>18</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." <sup>19</sup> (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me."

### **Insight for Worship**

*Secrets of Heaven* 8153 by Emanuel Swedenborg

"Heaven is not located on high, but where the good of love is, and this resides within a person, wherever he or she might be."

### **SERMON: "God's Fish Story...For Real"**

How many great "fish stories" have you heard in your life? Have you ever heard what has been called a real doozy of a story? A WHOPPER of one?! Well, that is the backdrop of this extraordinary encounter that some of the surviving eleven disciples had in this post-resurrection account with the Lord. Allow me to share a summary with you right now of my best (by far) real life fish story, which happened when I was 18 years old. It was a wonderful, warm weather kind of Summer, back in late July, 1985. My family and our family's best friend, John, were all up at one of our favorite places on Earth back then: Ford Lake, Michigan, located 3 hrs. north of LaPorte near Ludington,

Michigan. Ford Lake is part of Fountain, Michigan, and it is the very place that my parents, John and Sharon, met each other for the first time in the summer of 1960. That is where they fell in love back in their late teen years, and because of their many great stories of that very beautiful and peaceful place, Ford Lake became a magical place for my siblings and me.

Where is your magical place located? It might be where you grew up, or, a favorite vacation spot? Well, Ford Lake is the most magical place for me, because it holds some of my most favorite roots and stories. At any rate, on one sunny vacation day in late July, 1985, my twin brother Quint and our best friend, John, decided it was time for us city slickers to go fishing! We got into our rowboat and made our way slowly across the “big bowl” of the lake—to a place where we thought the fish might be. We baited our hooks and down they went. We also flung the small anchor overboard, out the aft or front end of the boat. We sat there for an hour-and-a-half, chit-chatting at times, enjoying the sunshine, yet without even a nibble. At that point it was nearing Noon and we were getting hungry. We decided to row back home to our cabins for lunch. My brother Quint had the first turn rowing, and did so for about 15 minutes. Then it was my turn, so I put my back and body into it and rowed and rowed for another 15 minutes or more. We were then getting toward our end of the lake, and for some reason our progress seemed to be slowing down. I was still rowing hard, but our pace gradually decreased. So, given that John had the most muscle between us three young men, we decided to let him have a try. He got the oars into a full grip and boy did he row! His rowing was displacing a lot of water, and yet our progress was still slowing? Why?

We had proven ourselves to be very poor fishermen. But we were determined to be excellent rowboat captains. But the harder John rowed, the slower we went! It seemed that the laws of physics were no longer worker for us on Ford Lake. Well, John’s pride was now at stake, and so with double the force as before, he **REALLY ROWED** with them oars! Then something really bizarre happened: when John rowed with all of his might, suddenly the front end of the boat swung around! We were completely baffled. We wondered if there was a strong current perhaps on that end of the lake—which was such a silly notion. John then turned the boat so that the front end was going straight to our shoreline. Again he rowed with all of his might! And again, the boat swung around. What the heck was going on?! And then, at that moment...the mystery became clear. We all forgot to pull the anchor up inside of the boat when we stopped fishing!! So, unbeknownst to us, the whole way across the lake we were dragging that darn anchor! No wonder the rowing became more and more difficult, as

we dragged the anchor on the bottom of the more shallow end of the lake. So, our “fish story” really wasn’t so much about catching fish, but rather, it was about what happens when three wanna-be captains were really “the Three No-Captains!” We did not catch any fish, but we sure caught a ton of laughter with the family, after the whole tall tale was shared over lunch.

So much for our fish story (or lack thereof) on Ford Lake. Our Gospel lesson this morning takes us back in time to when some of the Lord’s closest friends decided to return to the magical place where they first met and bonded with their wonderful Lord, Master and Savior, Jesus Christ. They returned to the Sea of Galilee—the little lake among the hills. That was the place where they spent a lot of time with Christ. As you may recall, a number of the disciples were fishermen when they first encountered this most unusual and very wise Rabbi. Capernaum was one of the seaside towns on the Sea of Galilee, which was the place where Jesus made His home after He left Nazareth. So many times He walked along the shores there, teaching and connecting with the people there...healing many of the sick people there. Over those waters Christ had sailed with His men in their fishing boats, and it was on the water there when the Lord had calmed a vicious storm one day.

But on this special day we are focusing on this morning in *John 21*, we find ourselves with a small party of the inner twelve disciples who were feeling lonely without their Lord among them. So, they returned to the place where they had spent many good days and evenings together. Night had fallen, and Peter told his companions that he was going fishing. They all fancied Peter’s plan and out they went all night long. But they couldn’t catch one blessed fish! In that sense they were just like my two fellow “No-Captains” and myself. We tried our best to catch even a few fish, but none took our bait. Just like those seven disciples, there are times in life when we give it our best shot, and yet nothing...nothing special happens. We can try and try and try, but it isn’t until we remember the most important thing of all—that actually the Lord has been with us, and yet we somehow keep His divinely-human powers and presence at bay.

But then, perhaps when we are at our wits end, suddenly a new light begins to dawn. We can toil and strain all night long, when suddenly we see a familiar figure standing there, on shore—smiling at us, perhaps. Then He says to us, “**Children, do you have any fish?**” And we respond, “No. We haven’t caught even one fish all night long.” In our Gospel story, Jesus tells these men to try casting their nets on the right side of the boat. Symbolically speaking, this powerful and seemingly small moment between Christ and His friends is loaded. We must remember that all of the regions of the Holy Land

have special meaning to them. The Lord came first to His disciples after His death upon His cross, after He had risen into His full Divine glory, in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was in the southern region of Judah, which means that the Lord was teaching them first of all that He would be with them in their deep, interior affections of goodness and love—for there we shall most readily feel and experience the Lord through loving and caring for each other.

But the Lord was true to His promise that soon He would be with them again, but it would be in the northern region of Galilee. Galilee and its beautiful lake symbolize our more outward thoughts and conduct. And so, this special encounter up north in Galilee teaches us the very important truth that the Lord will be with us in our daily labors and work of life. Jesus came to them in their old familiar place, by the shores of where they had spent so many days and nights. The Lord was telling His friends, as well as you and me today, that He would remain with them as He had been with them before.

Their occupation as fishermen signified that the Lord was calling them to serve an even higher purpose in life—helping God fish for people who were ready and needing to find their heavenly, inner purpose in life—that of lifting people up from merely natural states of being into their spiritual states of being! Toiling and working all night long and catching nothing pictures the ineffectiveness of effort we can make for heavenly life while forgetting to open up deeply and prayerfully to God. How easy it can be as workers in the Lord's church on Earth to strive to lead others into heavenly ways of life, doing so using our own strength alone without God's help and empowerment. This second great miracle of the disciples catching a huge netful of fish with the Lord's help happened to teach the disciples and you and me that only He could give them the real power to teach and lift up the souls of others in their upcoming ministry.

And the great power of the Lord is His pure, eternal Love. As our theology helps us to understand so clearly, **"the Lord is present with you the moment you start to love the neighbor!"** (*Secrets of Heaven* 904) The Lord's disciple, John, knew this so well, who said, "Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." (*1 John* 4:7) And Peter felt and understood this deep truth as well, who wrote, "Above all things, have fervent love for one another." (*1 Peter* 4:8) When we help the Lord fish for others and we do so with love and kindness, then it is His power really doing the work. Amen.