

The strategy of revitalization. (Joh 21:1-14)

* Dear Friends, today we continue to consider the power of Jesus' resurrection among us in terms of how this power affects our hope for better and our belief for improvement. Reflecting on Jesus' appearing to Thomas we've learned that Thomas' faith came to him through eye contact. He was blessed with faith by sight, but more blessed are those *who have not seen yet have believed*, (Joh 20:29). Saying this, Jesus pointed toward the future generations who will be given faith by means of written and spoken words, (Joh 20:31; Rom 10:17). However, spiritual visions and experiences of the living Christ have not disappeared with the Ascension. Jesus continues to live among his people giving them provision and understanding of his will. We cannot neglect the fact of Jesus' governing in the Church, even some of our opponents nod their agreements after seeing the mighty deeds.

* Now following the order of Jesus' appearing, after Thomas he revealed himself at the third time on the Sea of Tiberius. Chapter 21 of John's Gospel says that once Peter decided to go fishing, six other disciples went after him. All night they hunted for fish here and there, but unsuccessfully. Suddenly a stranger appeared on the shore. He said, *Children, have you taken any fish? They made answer, No. And he said to them, Let down the net on the right side of the boat and you will get some. So they put the net in the water and now they were not able to get it up again because of the great number of fish.* (vv.5,6). Please note that the fishermen had not argued but did according to the words of the stranger. As a result, they caught a large amount of fish. Peter's friend, probably John, right away found the correct explanation to that catch of fish, and Peter found the adequate response to John's discovery. He jumped into the sea and he was first to see Jesus, face to face. At the same time the other Brothers pulled the net; *then they got to land and saw a fire of coals, with fish cooking on it, and bread*, (v.9). There they had a morning meal with Jesus and 153 fish to go. It was awesome.

* Significantly, this story is not about the successful fishing and the outdoor meal with the Lord. Though it was awesome, as I said, yet this story contains the important theological applications regarding successful evangelism. Thinking about the contemporary situations concerning the traditional churches (USA) today, we see that many have failed in doing evangelism successfully.

For example, according to the statistics of the National Council of Churches' 2010 yearbook, the Presbyterian's are down 3.28 %; The Episcopalian's down 2.81%; Baptist's down 2%; and Our Synod down 1.92%. At the same time the Catholic's, Mormon's and Jehovah's grow up around 1.5%. In order to be survived the downward movements, some churches have made a great effort including our local church. But today we will not specify the amount of energy and resources our church has already contributed to evangelism, rather I want to focus on things that cost us nothing. On the other hand, without those things we would not be the successful fishers-evangelists. Now we will stop worrying about percentages because our Lord can give us a vision in order to escape the down and be blessed with the up.

* Almighty God, merciful Father, Your kindness made the light of the Gospel to shine among us. Extend Your mercy now, we pray, on behalf of all the people who have still not known the hope in Jesus Christ. We offer to You our resources and energy to make salvation through Jesus Christ known to the lost. We implore You, equip us by the knowledge and by the power of your Son's resurrection so that we will be able to accomplish our visions of growing St. Luke's church, so that the hearts of many would turn to You; through Jesus Christ, Your Son our Lord. Amen.

* Now in hopes of receiving assistance from the Lord we will concentrate on John's message and look for the important theological application. John's says that the company of apostles headed by Peter went fishing at night. In view of Jesus' remarks mentioned by the Synoptic Gospels, 'fishers,' 'fishing' and its attributes in symbolical language stand for: - spreading the apostles' belief; - catching hearts by the gospel; - the faith and hope in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Now, relating the fishing symbols to evangelism, I am going to combine the figurative language with the literal.

* According to Scripture, Peter and his friends were professional fishermen-evangelists; they knew a strategy of fishing-evangelism and it seemed to them that they didn't need a teacher. However, on that particular night they had caught nothing, which is similar to what was narrated by Luke's gospel in chapter 5.

Misfortune in fishing as well as in evangelism is the result of plentiful self-assurance and the lack of provision.

But when Peter and other fishermen - evangelists followed the Word and the Spirit, they caught many fish-men, (Luk 5:4-6; Act 2:41, 4:4; 13:43 ...). For some of us it is surprising to hear that God Himself is the chief Missionary. *Look*, the Sovereign God said, *I myself will search for my sheep and seek them out*, (Eze 34:11).

* *And Jesus said to them, Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men*, (Mar 1:17). Friends, what would be your response if Jesus addressed this call to you? Like Simon and Andrew are you ready to follow Jesus' word with the conscious design of doing good to everybody regardless of poor or ethnic background? Are you really long for a new flock who may expect your help instead of helping to pay off our bills? Notice, when the apostles went out fishing they did it in anticipation of having fried fish on their breakfast table. Significantly, after successful fishing they had not eaten from that catch. Jesus himself furnished the breakfast table as it says, *When they got to land, they saw a fire of coals there, with fish cooking on it, and bread*,(v.9). *Come and take some food*, (v.12) Jesus said. Therefore, our motivation in bringing the new members out of the world ought to originate from our inner desire to serve the spiritual needs of those people. On the contrary, the carnal motivations will not help in doing our evangelism successfully; but if it is necessary, the Lord will provide as much as we need; don't be afraid.

* Now let me to tell you a story. Recently one woman called to our church. She said, I am looking for a job. Does your church need a cleaner? My wife replied, Right now we don't have a such position because there are only several of us. But we believe that God will give St. Luke's the growth. You are welcome to worship with us, and you will be first on the list. The woman replied, Oh, I will be first on the list, and when your church grows I can fill this position! Sounds good, I will come. After hearing that conversation, my mood upped to the cheerful state. Wow, I thought, that lady is also first if to take into account her rush to believe.

* I told this story on purpose. Just keep in mind that lady's rush to believe and ask yourselves, Can my work as an evangelist to be successful, even if I don't want to believe the positive outcome? To answer this question we will reflect again on the two miraculous draughts of fish, painted by Luke and John.

Similar to John, from Luke's account we knew that Peter and some other fishermen labored all night but

unsuccessfully. Upon Jesus request to cast a net one more time, Peter answered, *Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing! But at your word I will lower the nets*, (Luk 5:5). It seems that Peter's response was said with a light irony that demonstrates his unbelief; but respecting the Teacher, he obeyed his word. Soon after casting his net we see Peter in distress; holding a great haul of fish by both hands he asked for help by nodding his head. This story teaches that even the skeptics like Thomas can be rewarded with faith; but if the skeptics obey God's plan they will be rewarded with fruits for their obedience as Peter and with faith as Thomas.

* The astonishment at the catching of fish enlightens us with a new vision and hope to work out the ministry of evangelism successfully. It is in this latter sense, after finding ourselves as the valuable disciples of Jesus Christ, we are renewed with faith. After all, doing Christ's commission by not our own strength, because we are powerless and mortal, but by the power of the ever living God, we will be rewarded with a "large haul of fish-men" that is beyond all our expectations.

Beloved grace and help be with you always in doing work for Christ successfully.

Amen