

Fishing Off the Map | John 21:1-6

21 After these things Jesus ^[a]manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested *Himself* in this way. ² Simon Peter, and Thomas called ^[b]Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the *sons* of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together.

³ Simon Peter *said to them, “I am going fishing.” They *said to him, “We will also come with you.” They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing.

⁴ But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ So Jesus *said to them, “Children, you do not have ^[c]any fish, do you?” They answered Him, “No.” ⁶ And He said to them, “Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find *a catch*.” So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish.

The other day I heard a story on This American Life. It’s a story that took place in 1980 in Damascus, Arkansas where there was a nuclear missile silo. In this silo is the Titan II, the most powerful nuclear weapon in the American arsenal. There’s three key features of the Titan II that we want to note:

- **First: it’s power potential:** This missile has the same explosive power as all of the bombs dropped in World War II – that is all of the bombs dropped in the 50 countries that participated in WWII – take all of the bombs dropped in all of these theaters, add in the atomic bombs dropped in Japan, and **multiply by three**. All the bombs in WWII, times three – that’s the power of the Titan II nuclear war head.
- **Second,** it was also distinguished by being **among the oldest** bombs in the U.S. nuclear arsenal. Developed in the 1960s.

- **And third**, is that it was developed when **liquid fuel** was still used whereas more modern missiles use solid fuel which is much more stable.

The problem with the liquid fuel is that it's so volatile. In the case of the Titan II, the missile consisted of two gigantic tanks: each filled with fuel that is highly explosive when they come in contact with each other, **but each** is highly volatile on its own. In fact, if there were enough fumes from the fuel and you waved your hand too fast, the friction from your hand could cause it to explode. Workers at the silo actually had a greater fear of the fuel than the nuclear warhead.

The Titan II – a highly volatile, unstable situation.

Does your life sometimes feel unstable and volatile? Do the possibilities of what could be ever frighten you? And when problems do occur, how do you respond?

Prayer:

On September 18, 1980 two technicians went into the missile silo to do some routine maintenance. As we've noted, the missile was built in the 60s, and both the rocket and the equipment in the facility were aging so things didn't always work smoothly. The two technicians struggled to get their work platform to the spot they needed and when they finally arrived they realized they had left the impact wrench in the truck – back at the top, outside of the locked and secured

facility. Rather than go through the trouble and time to retrieve it, they decided to improvise and used a giant socket wrench to remove a dust cap. It worked well and there were no problems until, as they were putting the tool away, the socket fell. It shouldn't have been a big deal as the platform they were standing on should have caught it. And if it didn't, the rubber skirt between the platform and the rocket should have caught it. But again, the equipment was aging and the rubber had warped. The socket bounced and slipped into the small space the warping had created and it fell down the side of the missile, through the silo. The socket picked up maximum speed and as it fell it hit the top of the thrust ring and ricocheted into the side of the missile where it punched a hole and fuel began spraying out.

They have a problem.

A problem they don't know what to do about -- and these two technicians are panicked and terrified. There are no guidelines, no procedures, no protocol to guide their next step.

This. should. never. have. happened,

so in all of the engineering and safety drills, nobody has thought through this scenario to come up with a solution ahead of time.

The two technicians didn't know what to do, so they... did nothing ...and the situation escalated. Pretty soon alarms and sirens began going off in the missile's command center. There is confusion and discussion, but no solutions. And it's about this time in the story that they use the term that caught my attention: One of the commanders states in his retelling of the events that "We were off the map."

We were off the map.

No familiar landmarks to guide their next steps. Nothing like this had been planned for. They're in new territory with nothing to help guide their decisions. They were flying blind...off script.... Off the map.

Are there are times in life that **you** find yourself off the map too?

In an unfamiliar situation?

Surrounded by unplanned circumstances?

You're unprepared. No protocol... no procedures... no policies to guide you.

Simply, off the map:

Finding ourselves off the map is something that should be familiar to Christians.

Because the Christian life **is** one of surrender and following Jesus into territory we

don't know. Of active ministry and, much as we would like there to be, there are no easy formulas to follow in ministry.

So as unsure as we are of ourselves, operating off the map is also where we find the most powerful moments of Christian life.

The Bible shares a story of the disciples when they were operating "off the map" too.

The disciples had spent **three years** with Jesus. They had walked together, talked together. Lived not only as disciples, but as friends.

During their time with Jesus they learned about compassion for children, they learned about the value of women and Samaritans, they heard how greed can keep you from the most important things of life and so much more!

The disciples had listened, learned and had followed what Jesus had told them to do. **They felt they were prepared for anything**, *even* Jesus taking kingship of Israel. They were ready!

But they were **not** prepared for Jesus' death and its aftermath.

At the cross, the disciples went "off the map". Even three days later, when they learned the hope of Jesus' resurrection they couldn't orientate themselves in the

new territory. Of all the scenarios they had imagined finding themselves in, this wasn't one of them.

The landscape had changed and they didn't know how to navigate the new territory. There were so many unknowns.

- They did know the tomb was empty.
- And they knew Jesus was risen.
- But they **didn't** know what it meant or what was coming next.

Their minds were filled with thoughts and emotions without anchors.

Emotions like regret. Regret for the lost opportunity to be with Jesus and fully appreciate the value of His presence and friendship. Regret that they hadn't listened more and asked more questions. Jesus had talked about His death, but in their insistence that it wouldn't happen, they missed the opportunity to prepare.

What are the regrets in your life?

- Opportunities missed or bungled?
- Pitfalls not avoided?

You're in good company...

The disciples felt fear. The crowds had loved Jesus and flocked to him. He was what we might today call an "influencer" racking up Likes on their Instagram

page. The disciples' association with Jesus had made **them** accepted and admired too. They relied on Jesus' wisdom and judgement and rode the wave of public opinion.

But crowds are fickle and popularity is fleeting.

With the death of Jesus, the disciples became the minority. The mob had turned on Jesus and the few disciples that were left were fearful for their own safety.

They locked themselves in a room -- not knowing what to do. Like the men at the missile silo, they are distraught and without clear direction.

When have you felt alone and isolated? Without the comfort of an empathetic ear? Don't despair, God is listening! Our validation doesn't come from the crowd, it comes from the assurance that you are a child of God.

And the disciples felt like failures. They had abandoned Jesus in His hour of need. The whole plan went up in smoke and they were left not understanding what was going on or what to do.

Have you experienced failure? Broken relationships, lost jobs, failed ventures?

The would've, could've, and should've becomes so clear in hindsight.

And when we're frightened and unsure, when we feel like failures -- we often revert back to a time when we **didn't** feel like that. We look for a touchstone of our competence and feeling in control. Something familiar that will satisfy our need to accomplish something – anything.

In John chapter 21, we find the disciples doing this. In verse 2 it tells us that Simon Peter, Thomas and Nathaniel, James, John and two other disciples were together and Peter declared "I'm going fishing."

They knew fishing!

Before Jesus called them, they had been successful fishermen and being able to accomplish something tangible sounded good. So, they all went with him.

But once Jesus enters your life -- you can't go back. And sometimes He makes that clear to us.

Verse 3 of chapter 21 it says that "they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. "

They had returned to the sea to give their egos a boost. A net full of fish would give them some needed satisfaction. Raise their morale.

But they caught... nothing.

Historians believe that when the disciples went fishing that night they used a method where a net was used to encircle a school of fish once they were spotted -- from the surface to the bottom they create a barrel out of the netting to trap the fish in the center. Then a casting net was dropped into the middle to draw out the fish. The disciples **knew** there were fish in the water. The fish had nowhere to go, so why aren't they catching any in the nets?! What else had gone wrong? ...

But failure doesn't always mean you did something wrong, it can mean that God is pointing you in a different direction.

God interceded to make the nets ineffective that night so that the disciples would know, unequivocally, that fishing for Biny, Sardines and Musht was a thing of the past for them. That there was a new path..a new map.. to follow. They would be fishing for something new. Fishing for people... to capture hearts and reunite them with their creator and redeemer.

Can you imagine what might have happened if they had been successful that night? Not that fishing was wrong or taking a moment to enjoy something you're good at is being unfaithful. But think about that particular experience. If they had

caught a net full of fish would they have been tempted to throw in the towel and go fishing whenever things got tough?

Praise God for failure!

Because they failed, the disciples went on to follow and explore that new map. A map that really, had always been there. But by following Jesus and being open to His lead, they were able to find it.

There are points in the Christian life when you **will** be “off the map.” When, despite all of your planning, preparation, strategizing and training, you will experience unknown territory. God asks us to go beyond ourselves in ministry and into His territory.

To **willfully** and **willingly** step off the map.

And this is where we meet God in the most powerful ways. This is where we clearly see **our deficiencies** and **God’s sufficiency’s**. We learn, like the Psalmist, to put our hand, representing all our power, into God’s hand –into His power -- and walk in faith.

In the story of the missile accident the results were disastrous. An explosion did occur. There are dramatic descriptions of the event by those who witnessed it –

the loud bang – the concussion of wind -- gravel falling like rain along with pieces of metal and chunks of concrete the size of pickup trucks and school busses.

As you can imagine, the end result at the missile site was total devastation. The silo's door, a 1.5 million pound slab of concrete and steel, had blown off, spun like a Frisbee and landed more than 500 feet away. The nuclear warhead ended up about a quarter mile away. Thankfully it was intact, in a ditch, or our maps of the U.S. would no longer include Arkansas.

Being off the map at a nuclear missile site is not good.

However, for a Christian being off the map it is not only ok, but often the right place to be. Our maps are limited and **need** to be stretched. When we step out of our known and safe environments, then we are able to explore new territory with God as our guide. Jesus can see the maps that we cannot and will navigate us through them.

In Deuteronomy 31, at the end of Moses' life, he addresses the Israelites and says:

Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you."

And he repeats the message to Joshua in verse 8: The LORD is the one who goes ahead of you; He will be with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed."

Jesus has a plan and a future for you. Something new, something you haven't considered yet. Do not be afraid. Do not give up and revert to the safety of the past. To the times you felt confident and in control.

They are an illusion.

When *you* feel you are lost, God is working on your behalf. Unfolding a new future for you just like He did for the disciples.

When it seems like the world has turned against you and you're weak and vulnerable. Know that this is the beginning and there is something good right around the corner. God has a plan and He's waiting for you to step off the map and find out that the new territory is better than you ever imagined.

The end for us is not devastation – but instead, hope and a future.

Because ... when I'm off the map... that is when I find my way. That I learn to rely on God's wisdom rather than my own.

So I encourage you to "Get off the map." Have courage. Put your hand in His and walk with Him into the unknown.