

Sunday, May 3, 2026 Fifth Sunday of Easter Sermon
“A Fruitless Catch” Pastor Takaaki Inoue
John 21:1–14

① [A fishing trip where nothing is caught]

The Gospel of John ends with Chapter 20, which concludes with a statement of the book’s purpose. This indicates that Chapter 21 was added later. Since almost all ancient manuscripts include this chapter, we know that it was added at a fairly early stage. I’d like to discuss the reason for its addition next week.

Let’s read today’s story. The disciples had returned from Jerusalem to their hometown of Galilee. Peter and six other disciples got into a boat and went out to fish, but they caught nothing that night. There is symbolic meaning in this fruitless fishing. Previously, Peter had experienced a fruitless fishing trip on this very Sea of Galilee. Afterward, Jesus said to him, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Mark 1:18), and he became a disciple. A “fisher of men” refers to a missionary. Therefore, a “fruitless fishing trip” signifies a lack of people coming to faith.

② [To save the human soul, power from above is absolutely essential]

As dawn broke, Jesus was standing on the shore, but the disciples did not recognize him. They were looking only at the lake and had not looked up. Yet even though the disciples did not see the Lord, he saw them. Jesus called out to them, “Children, do you have anything to eat?” The disciples replied, “No.” Jesus said, “Cast your net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” (vv. 5–6) When they cast their net, there were so many fish that they could not haul it in. When they pulled the net ashore, it was filled with 153 large fish. Jerome, in the fourth century, interpreted this to mean that these represented all the species of fish in the Mediterranean Sea, symbolizing that everyone would be saved. The fact that the net did not break despite catching so many fish represents the Church, which accepts everyone and remains unbroken no matter what happens. One scholar also interpreted “the right side of the boat” as signifying the Gentiles.

What is the difference between the “fruitless fishing” described in the Gospel of John and that in the Gospel of Luke? In Luke’s account, Jesus is in the boat, while in John’s, He is on land. Jesus in the boat likely represents His pre-resurrection form, while Jesus on land represents His post-resurrection form. The boat represents the church, the lake symbolizes this unstable world, and the shore symbolizes the Kingdom of God. However, in either case, it means that without heeding Christ’s words, no harvest could be reaped. The reason people are not being saved is that humans have been evangelizing by relying on their own strength, knowledge, and experience. Those who try to do it on their own do not rely on Christ. Christ watches over us patiently, even through the night, until our

strength is exhausted and we recognize our own helplessness. To save human souls, human goodwill and effort are not enough; power from above is absolutely necessary. This is because the birth of a believer is the work of God. It is written, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent” (John 6:29). Therefore, we should cultivate the habit of relying on Christ and listening to Him at all times.

● Cito Koryander writes: “The Church Fathers are unanimous in saying this: First, no matter what happens, you must not rely on your own strength. The battle you are about to begin is so difficult that you cannot possibly fight it through to the end with human strength alone. If you rely on your own strength, you will be quickly defeated and lose even the will to continue fighting.”

● Jerome writes: “In the mystery of the Eucharist, we eat the flesh of Christ and drink His blood; but in the reading of Scripture, we likewise eat the flesh of Christ and drink His blood. To me, the Gospel is the body of Christ.”

We must realize that nothing can begin without a “holy life”—one in which we read the Bible and pray at all times. We must invite God into our lives and build our lives upon the foundation of Christ.

③ **[The purpose of the Christian life is to know the Lord]**

The disciples “came ashore and found a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and some bread” (verse 9). Both the bread and the grilled fish were already prepared on shore. So why did He make them go through the trouble of fishing? Why do we evangelize? Is it to increase the number of believers? The Bible says, “All who were appointed to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48), suggesting that those who believe are predestined. The purpose of our evangelism is to know that God truly lives and to experience His works. To put it simply, it is “to know God.” A phrase that appears repeatedly in the Old Testament is, “When I act to reveal My glory, you will know that I am the Lord.” Our entire life of faith on earth exists “to know the Lord.” The same applies to building a church. It is not to leave a building standing forever in this world. Nor is it because the building is cramped or inconvenient. It is “to know that God is alive” through the act of building the church. That is why it is written here that the disciples “knew that he was the Lord” (John 21:12). Whether the church is large or small, it is meaningless unless “the Lord’s work” is manifested.

④ **[Having breakfast with Christ = A foretaste of the Kingdom of God]**

Jesus said, “Come and have breakfast” (verse 12), and took the bread and fish and gave them to his disciples. This brings to mind Psalm 23:5: “You prepare a table before me.” This meal by the shore evokes the table in heaven. It also brings to mind the Lord’s Supper in the church. Interestingly, the Bible begins with the story

of eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and ends with the story of eating the bread received from Jesus' hands. The Bible is consistently permeated with "stories of eating."

●The church is but the tip of the iceberg of the Kingdom of Heaven, or the shore of the Kingdom of Heaven. Why the shore? Because it is connected both to heaven and to the sea of this world. Miyakojima Church is merely the smallest part of it. Behind Miyakojima Church lies the eternal Kingdom of God. A church that transcends time, space, and place is now present in this world, serving as a window to heaven. This church is smaller than any other, and the people of this world pay it no mind. It is a small gate and a narrow path. This world is mighty, and all its buildings are grand and large; people believe they will remain forever. But when the time comes, all adornments will fall away, and all things of this world will crumble. Then the vast Kingdom of God, which has been hidden, will be revealed. For "God has put all things under His [the Son's] feet" (1 Corinthians 15:27). All things will be subject to Christ. At that time, the Church, which is His body, will also be exalted. And people will know that this tiny Toshima Church, which no one ever paid any attention to, was the gate to God's eternal Kingdom. No matter how small it may be, the Church is the holy mystical Body of Christ. The Holy Spirit fills it, Christ is present there, He communes with people, and He bestows the life of God. Long ago, Moses did not know that the place where he stood was where God was. He thought it was just a desolate place like any other. But God said to Moses, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5). The same thing will be reenacted at the end of the world. This Miyakojima Church is the holy body of Christ, the footstool of the Lord. At that time, people will say: "Oh, why didn't I come to this place more often? Oh, why didn't I listen to the eternal Word and partake of the Holy Communion, which is true food, more often here? Oh, why didn't I devote my life and time to what lasts forever?"

Everyone who comes to church is already standing on the shores of heaven. What matters is that we stand on the same shore as the risen Christ. It means we are sharing a meal with the risen Christ. You are already standing in and living in a new world. That gives me courage. May only what He has done remain forever. May the works of us humans fade away. May every tongue praise and glorify Christ. We want to gaze upon the eternal shore and devote ourselves to proclaiming the Kingdom of God.