

Scripture: John 21:1-14

Sermon Title: "Not Torn"

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In our Scripture reading today, we hear about another post-resurrection encounter that some of the disciples experienced with the Risen Christ. And this encounter includes a miraculous catch of fish. So many fish in fact were caught that the seven disciples couldn't even pull the net up onto the boat, but they had to drag the net through the water back to shore. A bountiful catch indeed! But, what was Jesus trying to reveal through that glorious catch of fish? What is Jesus still trying to reveal through that glorious catch of fish?

Much thought has been put into this question throughout history – particularly around explaining why 153 fish were caught – because John makes a point to tell us exactly how many were in that net. What is the significance of this number? Is there a significance? If it is not important, why not just call it a large number of fish? Many answers have been given to these questions and one that has been circulating and pondered for a long time is the idea that, at this time in history, some people would suggest that there were 153 different types of fish known to humanity and that we deduce that the 153 included one of every kind – signifying the type of church that we should strive to be – one where everyone feels and knows that they are welcome. What a beautiful thought, isn't it? That the net of God's love is great enough for all of humanity to enjoy – that the wideness of God's mercy can reach around the world and hold us all. Truly beautiful.

And so there are some wonderful lessons to learn and uncover when we think about those fish. But today, I want us to not only learn from the fish, but also from the net. And not only a net that was filled with 153 fish, but a net that was not torn.

I remembering going with my family on occasion to go fishing. Now, I was by no means a good fisherman, in fact I often hooked more rocks than I did fish. But when I

was able to avoid the rocks and I found a fish on the end of my line, I would almost assuredly break the line. Why? Well, when I knew I had a fish on the other end I started reeling with all my might and pulling as much as I could and the tension in the line would grow and grow, and if the tension gets too great, what happens? It breaks. And I remember being told over and over to let out some line, relieve the tension before continuing to reel, but I wanted that fish – and so I pushed that line to the limit and, because that line did indeed have a limit, when I exceeded it, the line would break.

A fishing net, like a fishing line, has a limit – has a breaking point – a point where they will indeed be torn. We as human beings have our limits as well. Our lives have limits. We only have so much time, after all there are only so many hours in the day, and so we can only do so much. We only have so many resources. We only have the talents that we possess so we can't do it all. We often only have so much patience to deal with whatever life is throwing our way.

And we all know where our limits lie for a variety of things in our lives – we know where the limits of those around us, those who are closest to us also lie – or we discover such limits over time through trial and error. Being that it is Mother's Day, I feel a little sense of obligation to help illustrate this point by sharing about a moment where I pushed the limit with mom. I remember one moment in my childhood when my mom wanted me to do something and I didn't want to do it – I don't think I was a unique child in that – all children have those moments right? The funny thing is, I can't even remember what the thing was, but I remember how that conversation ended. She said something like, "you are going to do it." I said, "no". She said, "Josh!" And then, I hit the limit when I looked at my mom and said, "Loretta!" And I could tell by the look in her eye, that I needed to step back, give in, and relieve some of the tension for that line was about to snap!

And so I share that with you simply to illustrate that we all have our limits – those around us have limits. And we need to know where they lie so that we don't push beyond them as for us to break. However, this does not mean that tension in our lives is

an inherently bad thing. And when I say tension, I don't mean mounting hostility that we often associate with the idea of rising tension, I mean tension as in the net. The net that the disciples threw over the right side of the boat which then was filled with 153 fish, certainly was feeling some tension, but if it had no tension in it, that would have meant that there were no fish to be found. If we don't have some tension on our lives, they won't produce the bounty that our lives have the potential to yield. If we don't have some tension on our time, we don't accomplish all the wonderful things we could - all the wonderful things that we should. If we don't have some tension as we try new things, we may never fully witness the potential that God has placed in our lives. And yes, even if we don't have some tension on our lives that tests our patience, we may never fully care for others and for the world as God hopes that we would. As we see through the tension that the full net was experiencing, we are reminded of the good that can come by taking us to our limits.

And you may ask, what was the benefit of that moment of tension that I shared with my mom? Well, though it was a terrifying moment, what it produced was an understanding within me of the importance that my mom felt when she was called "mom". I began to see why me calling her "mom" was so important to her, to her life - for that name honors all that she has been and continues to be in my life. And so through that moment, though I wouldn't want to relive it, something indeed good did come from it - I gained a deeper understanding about my mom's sense of being a mother and all that that meant to her.

Yes, tension does not have to be a bad thing when it comes to our lives. For in tension, a bounty can be produced. When we allow our lives to be the net, a glorious catch can be yielded, and for a net to be filled, it will need to feel some tension. And yet, we want to make sure that our net, like the one that Jesus filled with fish, is not torn. For a net does have a breaking point. We want to be aware of our limits and not push beyond those limits so that our nets remain whole.

But if it does begin to tear, if your limits are pushed too far, if the tension in your life grows too great, take heart in knowing that God's net surrounds you always. That even if tension causes your net to tear, you are caught in the love of God that will never break and that will never release you. That even when life can seem to push us beyond our limits, God's net will catch us and hold us through all that life may bring.

And so, where in your life must you release some tension as for your net to remain untraced? Where are you being called by Jesus to add a little tension, to push yourself a little more so that a bountiful catch may be found? Where do you feel God's net holding you in all that life throws your way? May our nets be full with glorious works of God's kingdom. And may the whole world know the net of God's love that surrounds, holds, and will forever be not torn. Amen.