

"Expect to be Surprised"

Text: John 21:1-14

May the cross of Christ lead you to grieve over the evil of your sins, but may that same cross fill you with pure, unreserved joy that also your own personal sins there, on that cross, found full and complete forgiveness. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

I wonder how many of you like to be surprised. Some don't. Depends on the surprise. Like it or not, it's going to happen. Life is going to take unexpected turns – some good, some bad. Things you count on fall apart, and what could never possibly work out just suddenly falls into place. Interestingly enough, no matter how often we are reminded to *expect* surprises, we are still surprised. Snow birds return to North Dakota in mid-April, thinking they had cleverly escaped the winter. *Surprise*. My wife and I once went to Arizona in early spring, thinking we'd escape the end of the North Dakota winter. It snowed. *Surprise*.

We need to come to grips with the fact that life is going to be full of the unexpected. In fact the only thing that ought to surprise us is a prolonged *lack* of surprises. Surprises tend to be the norm, so we may as well get used to it.

Our text for this morning demonstrates the point nicely. There we find lots of surprises, of both kinds – good and bad. That text is God's Word recorded in John's Gospel, the 21st Chapter:

ESV John 21:1-14 After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. ² Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, 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 go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. ⁴ ¶ Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered him, "No." ⁶ He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. ⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. ⁸ The other disciples came in the

boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off. ⁹ ¶ When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." ¹¹ 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. ¹² 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. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

These are God's words - the means of grace, the means to create and preserve saving faith in our hearts, and the means to instill in us Godly wisdom and contentment. That our God would richly bless us through the study of his words this morning, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by the truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!"** Amen.

Surprises were the rule rather than the exception for Jesus' disciples, weren't they? Think of all the amazing things they witnessed – healing, feeding, walking on water. They saw Jesus killed, and then saw him alive again. After his resurrection they were alone in a locked room and suddenly he was standing among them. He walked along the road with them, and then he was gone. It seemed like he would continue to pop in and out of their lives indefinitely, and then one day he bodily ascended into heaven before their eyes. A short time later the disciples were sitting around on a Sunday morning, and suddenly they were not only filled with the Holy Spirit, but they could instantly all speak foreign languages that they had never studied. After three years of seeing all that they had, you would think they would have grown accustomed to surprises.

But then that's really not the nature of the beast, is it? That's not how surprises work – especially not when it came to Jesus. The unexpected was the rule, and yet the disciples seemed surprised every single time. Think for example of our Scripture readings for this morning. As far as the early Christian Church was concerned, they had no greater enemy, no one that posed a greater threat, than Saul. To the early Christian Church he was public enemy number one, and it was clear that he was not only *infamous* among the early Christians, he *terrified* them – with good reason. His sole purpose in life was to destroy the Christian faith by purging the world of every last adherent.

He seemed, at least outwardly, to be making good progress, going from door to door if need be and dragging Christians off to prison.

Think of the problem he posed for the early Church and just how insurmountable that problem must have seemed to them. Saul was not only a religious fanatic; he had the support and cooperation of the government. No Christian was safe.

God himself had a surprise for them. Imagine their shock (and skepticism) when their most formidable enemy was transformed in one miraculous moment into their greatest ally and spokesman. Consider for a moment just how amazing was the transformation from Saul the Church Killer to Paul the tireless and fearless spokesman for the Christian faith. In one shining moment God not only made their greatest problem disappear, he turned it into one of their greatest assets.

Maybe you've seen something similar in your own life – insurmountable problems that just had no solution suddenly made to disappear by the God who always has everything under control, who always has a plan - hidden though that plan might be from you and me.

Our second Scripture reading in Revelation 5 also held a surprise. Most are fine hearing about the events leading up to Judgment Day, the powerful angel, and the Lamb who alone was worthy to open the scroll that had been sealed with seven seals. But then the Lamb was described as having seven horns and seven eyes. Certainly not the description we expected. In fact most find the image somewhat disturbing, even a bit frightening.

We do that with God, don't we? We picture him in terms that we find agreeable. We tend to mentally create him in our own image, and anything that disrupts that image we find to be disconcerting, even suspect. The picture is probably *intended* to surprise us a bit – to snap us out of our reverie and complacency. John is just describing what he saw, but what he saw *symbolized* truths that God wanted to convey to his Church. The symbolism is neither difficult nor surprising, only the image of it. Seven is used as a number of completion. Horns are a symbol of power. Eyes are a symbol of sight and knowledge. Put it all together and it tells us simply that the **"Lamb that was slain"** (Jesus Christ) has been given all *power*, and that he *sees* and *knows* all things.

This brings us to our text for this morning. Did you notice any surprises there? Some are surprised by Peter's simple statement: **"I am going fishing,"** along with the reply of his companions: **"We will go with you."**

Why should that be surprising? They had, after all, been fishermen when Jesus called them. What *is* surprising is the thought that they would go back to their old way of life after Jesus had called them to become **"fishers of men."** Jesus had told them not only that he would rise, but that they should go back to Galilee *and wait for him there*. Maybe Peter was just looking for something to do while he waited, but the verb form he used seemed to indicate more than just a one-night outing.

The next surprise was that they fished all night and caught nothing. These were professional fishermen who had made their living by catching fish. Clearly catching *nothing* was not only unusual, it was in this particular case a part of God's plan, as well as a lesson for us. We can expect to accomplish nothing when we oppose God, when we choose a path contrary to God's will. Jesus taught the disciples this truth when he gave them *his* direction and therefore *his* promise of success: **"Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some."** Next surprise? They actually did what the stranger on the shore told them to do. Right side? Left side? What difference could that possibly make when you are casting and dragging a net? It's not as though they were fishing with hook and line that had to be dropped precisely into perfect position.

What happened next was clearly should *not* have been a surprise. It worked. Miraculously well. Again, you and I would do well to remember that when we work against God, we can expect only disappointment and frustration, but when we work in harmony with his will we cannot possibly fail. Does that mean we ought to expect financial wealth and secular success? Only if that is part of God's plan for our lives. It does mean that God can certainly be trusted when he says, **"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all of these things will be added to you."** In other words, it means that when we walk in harmony with God's will, what God provides might not be exactly what we expected or desired, but it will be right, and it will be enough.

The next surprise to me is that Peter put on his coat, his **"outer garment,"** before he jumped from the boat. Why would he do that? Would you? Some believe he put on his coat because he didn't expect to get wet. How eager Peter must have been, having denied his Lord, to get back to the point where he was able in faith to walk to his Lord on the water. Yet even if that was true, what made this case different was the fact that he was lacking what he had the first time he had walked on the water – Jesus' command to do so. We read next that he **"plunged into the sea."** Surprise? If it was, it shouldn't have been.

The message for you and me is that God has to lead, for it is not only God who grants the power and ability, it is God alone who *knows the plan*. God is not bound to our expectations of what we image is necessary or right or possible. Each of us needs to apply that truth to our own lives. Have you ever found yourself surprised and disappointed that something you attempted failed miserably, only to later realize that your actions contradicted God's clear counsel? Maybe you just assumed that God would give you the strength to bear up under some temptation, when in fact he had told you to flee from such circumstances. God has given us promises that he will certainly keep. Man has no right to assume success in the absence of God's promises; nor do we have a right to expect God's blessing when we act contrary to his Word and will.

We find another example in our text. Jesus *told* the disciples to bring in the net full of fish. Peter went. Might as well be Peter, he was already soaked. And miraculously the net didn't break. It should have, for no net of that day was designed to bear up under the weight of 153 large fish. See the difference? When Jesus actually *commanded*, success was guaranteed.

Christianity is like that – from first to last. In fact the Christian faith is one tremendous surprise after another. Man sinned, but God punished his own dear Son in man's place. Man cannot even, on his own, believe this to be true, so God sends his Holy Spirit – through the Word and through the Word connected with the waters of baptism – to create that saving faith. So simple, but how shockingly powerful. Man cannot even keep himself in that faith, so God the Holy Spirit does that too, continually strengthening us through the power of the simple message of law and gospel, sin and grace. And yet, when we clearly and faithfully share God's law and gospel, we seem surprised when it actually works. Souls are converted, preserved and saved, while all around us the wise, powerful, and learned opt for their own path and plunge themselves into a sea of despair and darkness.

How surprising, how *shocking*, that God would save the likes of you and me. How beyond comprehension that God would declare you and me to be holy and sinless without any merit or effort on our part. All this he has done for us. All of this ought to amaze us on a daily basis.

We shouldn't be surprised when he keeps his final promise to return, but we probably will be. Not surprised that he kept his promise, he always does, but surprised nonetheless that he chose the moment he did to keep it. Live then prepared to be surprised one last time, and then to be shocked at just what amazing things he has prepared for his children, things we can't even now imagine. Amen.

ESV **Acts 9:1-22** But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.³ Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.⁴ And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"⁵ And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."⁶ But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."⁷ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.⁸ Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.⁹ And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.¹⁰ ¶ Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord."¹¹ And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying,¹² and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight."¹³ But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem."¹⁴ And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name."¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.¹⁶ For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."¹⁷ So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized;¹⁹ ¶ and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus.²⁰ And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."²¹ And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?"²² But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

ESV **Revelation 5:1-7** Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals.² And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?"³ And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it,⁴ and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.⁵ And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."⁶ ¶ And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.⁷ And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.

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The Second Sunday after Easter – May 1, 2022

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 467 (*Stanzas 1-4, 7*) (*Red Hymnal*)
"Built on the Rock the Church doth Stand"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (*Brown Hymnal*)

The Scripture Lessons: (*Printed on the back page of this bulletin*)

The First Lesson: (Acts 9:1-22) This is the powerful account of the conversion of Saul, the chief persecutor of the early Christian Church, who later became Paul, the Church's chief missionary. Far too often we see only impossibilities and impose limits on God's power accordingly. God here demonstrates how he can turn even the most impossible problem to his advantage, and to the advantage of those he loves.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 96 (Page 26)

The Second Lesson: (Revelation 5:1-7) Because the imagery is often disturbing or unclear, many Christians read the Book of Revelation with a certain amount of trepidation and uncertainty. The Book is, however, intended by God himself as a source of comfort for Christians of all ages. We are to read the Book as God's promise that no matter how dark things appear here on this earth, Jesus Christ has already triumphed, and the sacrifice he made as our sin payment has already been accepted by his Father as full and complete.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15 (*Brown Hymnal*)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 35 (*Red Hymnal*)
"Songs of Praise the Angels Sang"

The Sermon – Text: John 21:1-14 (*Printed on the back of this bulletin*)
"Expect to be Surprised"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 320 (*Red Hymnal*)
"Lord Jesus, Think on Me"

The Prayer followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 780 (*Brown Hymnal*)
"Dear Lord, to Your True Servants Give"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

Attendance – Sunday (40) Average (30)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Monday	-10:00 a.m.	– Study Conference in Pierre
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship with Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Teacher Graduate Kendra Rodebaugh has accepted the call to Gethsemane School of Spokane. Seminary Graduate Zachary Sippert has accepted the calls to Redeemer of Bowdle and Zion of Ipswich. Pastor Michael Wilke has returned the call to Immanuel of Winter Haven. Redemption of Lynnwood has called Pastor David Ude.

Sponsors Needed – Kinship has announced the need for more sponsors, both for orphans and seminarians. Financial support ranges from \$25/month to \$50/month. For more information please contact Mr. Dan Roehl — danroehl@hotmail.com / 507-381-2042.

Regular Schedule Resumes – We return to our regular Wednesday schedule this week with Confirmation at 6:00 pm and Midweek Bible Study at 7:00 pm.

Study Conference – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to attend a study conference with area pastors in Pierre tomorrow.

CLC Youth Camp – is scheduled for June 12-18 and is open to kids going into grades 6-9. Cost is \$135/camper. There is also a morning pre-camp program available for kids going into grades K-5 with a cost of \$60/camper. **Registration is now open.** For more information visit youthcampclc.wixsite.com/camp