

April 8
Lesson 6 (NIV)

THE RISEN LORD

APPEARS

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 19:7-10; 119:105-112

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: John 21:1-14

JOHN 21:1-14

¹ Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: ² Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ³ “I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We’ll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴ Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

⁵ He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?”

“No,” they answered.

⁶ He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

⁷ Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “It is the Lord,” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. ⁸ The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. ⁹ When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

¹⁰ Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you have just caught.” ¹¹ So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.



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KEY VERSE

Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord.—John 21:12

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Recount the story of Jesus’ appearance at the Sea of Galilee following his resurrection.
2. Identify elements of the story that reveal Jesus’ constant provision for his followers.
3. Write a prayer of commitment to trust in Jesus’ provision under all circumstances.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. No Job Too Big or Too Small
- B. Lesson Background

I. Unhappy Result (JOHN 21:1-4)

- A. Fishermen at Work (vv. 1-3)
- B. Figure on the Shore (v. 4)

II. Unforeseen Provision (JOHN 21:5-8)

- A. Specific Command (vv. 5, 6a)
- B. Surprising Result (v. 6b)

Inconvenient Fishing

- C. Sudden Realization (vv. 7, 8)

III. Unexpected Meal (JOHN 21:9-14)

- A. Food Shared (vv. 9-13)
 - What We Need, When We Need It*
- B. Faith Strengthened (v. 14)

Conclusion

- A. Presence and Provision
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. No Job Too Big or Too Small

One of the most widely used business slogans is “No job is too big or too small.” Business people of all kinds want potential customers to hire them regardless of the circumstances. Is there so much to be done that you cannot even think where to begin? Call us! Is your task so small you cannot imagine someone bothering with it? Call us! But in fact, however, some jobs *are* too big or too small. How absurd to call a plumber to drain a large swamp or an exterminator to swat one fly.

Christians sometimes rule out certain matters as too big or too small for God. The evil and suffering of the world—including issues such as the inevitability of death, the terror of human existence, and the penalty for sin (Genesis 2:17)—might seem so big that some may not believe that God can do much about it. Meanwhile, our day-to-day needs may seem so trivial that we hesitate to “bother” God with them.

Today’s text reminds us that for God no matter is too big or too small. The apostle John’s account of Jesus, raised from the dead and meeting his disciples by the Sea of Galilee, is a profound reminder that by Jesus’ death and resurrection God is transforming our world to become what he always intended it to be and is overcoming the sin and death that infect our lives. In this story, Jesus surprises his disciples with a morning meal, a simple gesture that underlines his promise always to provide what they need.

B. Lesson Background

Today’s text is the first part of an extended narrative detailing one of Jesus’ appearances following his resurrection, an account recorded only by John. As the text opens, John has already recounted events from the day of the resurrection itself. Mary Magdalene, finding Jesus’ tomb empty, told Simon Peter and “the other disciple” (apparently John himself) that Jesus’ body had been taken (John 20:1, 2). The two rushed to the tomb to see for themselves (20:3-10). Then Jesus appeared to Mary, confirming that he was indeed raised from the dead (20:11-18).

Later that same day, the “first day of the week,” Jesus appeared to his disciples in a locked room (John 20:19-23). He appeared to them again a week later, that time addressing Thomas, who had been absent before. That man needed and received personal, tangible evidence that Jesus really was alive (20:24-28).

The appearance to Thomas is, in certain ways, the climax of John’s Gospel in light of Jesus’ statement, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29). John then immediately informs us of the “many other signs” (miracles) that Jesus performed (20:30). These comprise the fabric of this Gospel. Understanding the meaning of these signs, readers can put their faith in the risen Jesus whom they have not seen (20:31).

That purpose statement could be a good place for this Gospel to conclude. But there is yet a bit of unfinished business with the apostles in general and Peter in particular.

I. Unhappy Result

(JOHN 21:1-4)

A. Fishermen at Work (vv. 1-3)

¹ **Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way:**

We come to the final post-resurrection appearance of Jesus that is recorded in the Gospel of John. The general description *afterward* refers to the unspecified amount of time between the previous appearances in and near Jerusalem and the one that takes place *by the Sea of Galilee*. This body of water, also known as the Sea of Tiberias (John 6:1) and the Lake of Gennesaret (Luke 5:1), is a large freshwater lake of about 64 square miles. It is the dominant feature of the region where Jesus grew up and conducted much of his ministry.

HOW TO SAY IT

Didymus *Did-uh-mus*.

Galilee *Gal-uh-lee*.

Gennesaret *Geh-ness-uh-ret*.

Magdalene *Mag-duh-leen* or *Mag-duh-lee-nee*.

Nathanael *Nuh-than-yull* (*th* as in *thin*).

Nazareth *Naz-uh-reth*.

Tiberias *Tie-beer-ee-us*.

Zebedee *Zeb-ch-dee*.

It was along the shore of this lake that Jesus called his first disciples ([Matthew 4:18-22](#)). Those disciples were eyewitnesses of the miracles Jesus performed in the area, including four involving the lake itself: calming the storm ([Matthew 8:23-27](#); [Mark 4:37-41](#); [Luke 8:22-25](#)), the first catch of fish ([Luke 5:1-7](#)); walking on the water ([Matthew 14:25](#); [Mark 6:48-51](#); [John 6:16-21](#)), and a coin in a fish's mouth ([Matthew 17:27](#)).

With Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread now complete ([John 19:14](#)), some of the disciples have arrived back in this familiar territory (see [Mark 14:28](#); [16:7](#)). The walking distance from Jerusalem is about 70 miles.

² Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together.

Seven men other than Jesus are present: three who are named, two who are unnamed but identifiable, and *two other disciples* who are unidentifiable. The mention first of *Simon Peter* is fully consistent with his name appearing first in the listings of the Twelve in [Matthew 10:2-4](#); [Mark 3:16-19](#); [Luke 6:13-16](#); and [Acts 1:13](#). It is not uncommon in the New Testament for people to be known by more than one name, and Peter is one of those (compare [John 1:42](#)). *Thomas (also known as Didymus)* is another; the Aramaic word *Thomas* and the Greek word *Didymus* both mean “twin.” Popularly known today as “doubting Thomas” (see the Lesson Background), he is a man of courage (see [John 11:16](#)).

Nathanael from Cana in Galilee is mentioned toward the beginning of John's Gospel, when Peter and others first encounter Jesus ([John 1:35-42](#)). When confronted with Jesus' divine power, he exclaimed that Jesus was truly God's promised king of Israel ([v. 49](#)). Cana is the site of Jesus' first miracle ([2:1-11](#)), undoubtedly witnessed by Nathanael. One theory is that Nathanael is another name for Bartholomew ([Mark 3:18](#)). If that theory is correct, then Nathanael is one of the original 12 apostles.

The sons of Zebedee are James and John. Along with Peter and his brother Andrew, they are among the fishermen whom Jesus had called to follow him ([Mark 1:16-20](#)). With Peter they were invited as witnesses to Jesus' raising of a dead girl ([5:35-43](#)), Jesus' transfiguration ([9:2-8](#)), and his prayers in Gethsemane before his death ([14:32-42](#)).

James and John are not named in John's Gospel and are mentioned explicitly only in the account before us. An ancient and widely affirmed explanation for this is that John is the author of this account, elsewhere humbly calling himself the “disciple whom Jesus loved” to emphasize that his place in the story comes only because of Jesus' gracious love ([John 13:23](#); [19:26](#); [21:7](#)).

³ “I'm going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We'll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Some have interpreted Peter's announcement to be an expression of impatience or despair, a sign that he is returning to the old way of life from which Jesus had called him. But the text does not support this as the sole or even the best interpretation. Peter may simply be hungry, or he may want to retain a means of self-support, not knowing what the Lord intends for him personally. The others decide to join him. Fishing is generally done at *night*, when fish are nearer the water's surface and so that fish can be sold fresh the next morning. But as was the case previously, he fishes all night without a catch ([Luke 5:5](#)).

B. Figure on the Shore (v. 4)

⁴ Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

Some readers find it implausible that the disciples do not recognize Jesus. But dim light and long distance surely account for this fact. Further, the disciples may not be expecting to see the risen Jesus in this particular setting. In [Luke 24:16](#), part of another account of a resurrection appearance, Jesus seems deliberately to prevent his identity from being known. That may also be the case here.

II. Unforeseen Provision

([JOHN 21:5-8](#))

A. Specific Command (vv. 5, 6a)

⁵ He called out to them, “Friends, haven't you any fish?”

“No,” they answered.

Jesus calls out as an older man might speak to friends for whom he is concerned. Notably, the Greek text indicates that Jesus already anticipates the answer to his question: “You do not have any fish, do you?” The fishermen, undoubtedly tired and hungry from a night of repeatedly casting their nets, acknowledge that they do not.

^{6a} He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.”

Now Jesus speaks as much more than just a sympathetic onlooker. His instructions are specific, as they were in [Luke 5:4](#). There the fishermen were to “put out into deep water”; here he tells them to *throw your net on the right side of the boat*.

B. Surprising Result (v. 6b)

6b. When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

The result is immediate and overwhelming, as no fish are replaced by a *large number of fish* (numbered in [John 21:11](#) as 153). This outcome closely resembles what happened when Jesus previously challenged Peter to let down his nets one more time after an unproductive night ([Luke 5:4-7](#)).

What Do You Think?

In what ways can this verse encourage believers today?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In how we see past and current situations in light of each other

In how we anticipate the future

INCONVENIENT FISHING

A young Muslim man left his home in central Asia to study at a university in the U.S. Before classes even began, he suffered a brain aneurysm that almost took his life. He survived the aneurysm, but needed several surgeries over the course of the next year.

A friend from his hometown who was living in the U.S. cared for him. A local church heard about his plight and chipped in to help with the staggering medical bills. High school students from the church visited and helped him learn English. The young Muslim could have been ignored by Christians. Instead, Christians became Jesus' hands and feet in providing the care he needed.

We fulfill the Great Commission ([Matthew 28:19, 20](#)) as we "fish for people" ([4:19](#)). But not all "fish" are easy catches. The success of those fishing in [John 21](#) came after they had caught nothing all night. They had only blistered hands and sore muscles to show for their efforts. When advised to "throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some" ([v. 6](#)), everything in their experience probably said that such an action would be pointless. But they obeyed in faith, and a magnificent catch of fish was their reward.

The young Muslim man began learning about Jesus as Christians met his needs. Will he be captured permanently in the net of God's love in Christ? We pray so, but ultimately it's up to the man himself. Our task is to cast the net as the Savior desires. Will you be ready to do so, even at the most inconvenient times when you're the most worn out?

—L. M. W.

C. Sudden Realization ([vv. 7, 8](#))

7 Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water.

The *disciple whom Jesus loved* is, by traditional reckoning, the apostle John, author of this Gospel. He is the first to realize that the one who has just provided a huge catch of fish can only be the one who has command of the forces of nature. His declaration *It is the Lord!* is the basis for Peter's spontaneous act of swimming to shore to meet Jesus.



Visual for Lesson 6. As you discuss [John 21:7](#), point to this visual as you ask, “What caused you to first recognize Jesus for who he is?”

This personality difference is also seen in [John 20](#). “The other disciple, the one Jesus loved” ([20:2](#)) had rushed with Peter to Jesus’ tomb after Mary Magdalene’s report. Peter was the first to enter the tomb although he had arrived second ([20:3-7](#)). Eventually “the other disciple” overcame his caution and also entered the tomb, where “he saw and believed” ([20:8](#)); Peter’s state of belief is left unrecorded. It seems in both cases that John is the one with greater insight while Peter is the one with greater propensity to act.

What Peter does first upon hearing *It is the Lord* may be confusing, since it can seem that he puts on more clothes before jumping *into the water*! We should probably understand that he has been lightly clothed in a smock worn by fishermen, but that garment is loose around his body. He wraps *his outer garment around him* to secure it close to his body so it does not interfere with swimming or wading.

What Do You Think?

What can we do to ensure a consistently genuine witness in the presence of fellow believers?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

When gathered for Bible study
 When gathered for prayer
 When gathered for worship
 When participating in service projects
 Other

8. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards.

The distance to shore is not so great that Peter cannot swim to shore. The close proximity to the shore also helped the six other disciples cooperate to drag the net to shore, as they may have been unable to empty its contents into the bottom of the boat as was the usual practice. The Lord's provision is abundant, yet within their capacity to receive it.

III. Unexpected Meal

(JOHN 21:9-14)

A. Food Shared (vv. 9-13)

9. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

Those who come in from fishing for their breakfast would not expect someone on shore to have a breakfast of cooked fish ready for them! That is all the more so when considering that a *fire of burning coals* requires considerable time to heat fully. But the Lord who directed the fish to the fishermen's net is also the Lord who fed the hungry multitudes with a scant amount of bread and fish (John 6:1-15). He is able to provide for his people in both large and small ways that astonish.

10. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught."

The disciples may be in something of a state of shock at this point. People in such a state may wonder what to do next. Jesus has the answer.

11. So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn.

We may wonder how far *Simon Peter* makes it toward Jesus before turning back to help with *the net . . . full of large fish*. The text does not say. However, the text does specify the number of fish and further implies that the net should break under the weight and volume of so many but does not. Readers also wonder about the significance of the specific number 153. Perhaps the reason for its inclusion is to highlight the impact of the miracle.

Jesus has called his disciples "to fish for people" (Matthew 4:18, 19). He has told them that as the Father had sent him, so he was sending them (John 17:18; 20:21). But how can this undistinguished band, so often marked by weak faith and failure, undertake such a task? The miraculous catch of fish points to the answer. By themselves, these men are inadequate. But empowered by the Spirit of Christ (16:7-11), they will do great things (14:12-14). Abiding in Jesus, relying on his provision, they will bear much fruit (15:1-11).

What Do You Think?

How did a time of God's unexpected provision prepare you for future service?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding a provision of finances
 Regarding a provision of emotional support
 Regarding a provision of Bible understanding
 Other

12. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord.

The Lord is host of this feast, and all present are his welcome guests. Gone is the doubt that had plagued Thomas and others. All recognize their host as the sovereign Lord who commands the elements and the creatures that dwell in them. He is the one who was dead but is now gloriously alive again. They will testify with confidence about him, bringing multitudes and generations who have not seen to believe in what they have seen.

What Do You Think?

How would things change were we to acknowledge Christ as host and center of mealtimes?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding mealtime conversations
 Regarding mealtime priorities
 Regarding dinner invitations
 Other

13. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.

Jesus' actions are described in a manner that highlights the meal as his gracious provision for his followers. As he did with the multitude, he distributes the *bread and fish* himself (John 6:11). It is a simple meal, one typical for the times, but also an abundant meal, with plenty for everyone.

WHAT WE NEED, WHEN WE NEED IT

As a child growing up in Zimbabwe, Isaac saw the graves of American missionaries who had died bringing the gospel to his people. He decided to be a missionary to the U.S. in gratitude to those who had sacrificed for him.

He was accepted to attend a seminary in America, but he needed visas. When he took his paperwork to the American embassy, he discovered that they would give visas to him and his wife, but not to their children. Not wanting to move without them, he declined the offer and went home.

The next day he sensed a divine pull to return to the embassy, even though he had no appointment. As Isaac sat down with the official who had interviewed him the day before, the ambassador walked in, looked at Isaac, and told the interviewer to give Isaac whatever he wanted. Isaac walked out with visas for himself, his wife, and their children!

Today, Isaac continues to take steps in faith, and God continues to provide. Isaac doesn't know where the funds for each step will come from, but God never lets him down. Sometimes God provides for us in big ways ([John 21:11](#)), sometimes in small ([21:13](#)). But faith to follow the Lord's leading must come first ([21:16](#)). Is lack of faith a challenge for you?

—*L. M. W.*

B. Faith Strengthened (v. 14)

¹⁴ This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

The enumeration *the third time* counts the appearances in [John 20:19-23](#) and [20:24-29](#) as the first and second of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances, respectively, *to his disciples*. But wait—what about the appearance to Mary Magdalene in [John 20:11-18](#)? Has John gotten his count wrong?

The answer is *no*, and the key lies in the phrase *to his disciples*. The word *disciples* is plural, whereas Jesus' appearance to Mary Magdalene represents an encounter with an individual. Further, the accounts by other Bible writers record additional appearances, including the mention of an appearance to Peter individually.

Jesus' resurrection was no illusion, no mere visionary experience in the minds and hearts of his followers. It was an unexpected, life-transforming event in real space and time. It altered the flow of history as it fulfilled the most important promises of God. The resurrection accounts of John and the others demonstrate how real and powerful was and is the resurrection of Jesus.

What Do You Think?

How would you describe the reality and power of Jesus' resurrection in your life?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In terms of how it affects your relationships with fellow believers

In terms of how it affects your relationships with unbelievers

Conclusion

A. Presence and Provision

Christ's presence with and provision for Christians are constant. Whether our lives are easy, hard, or somewhere in between, he is with us. Whether our faith feels strong, shaken, or somewhere in between, he never fails or forsakes us.

Jesus is not present in the flesh as he was for the disciples. But as he rules from Heaven and empowers by his Spirit, he is no less present with us than he was with them. Are we ready to acknowledge these facts, ready to receive what he gives, and ready to testify to his constant provision?

B. Prayer

Father, may we acknowledge daily that you are with us, providing for our every need and empowering us to fulfill your every task. May your rule in the world find an anchor in our hearts. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Jesus provides, now and forevermore.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV® Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV® Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Give each person a sheet of paper and a pen. Challenge them to look back over their lives and create a line graph depicting three highs and three lows they've experienced. Have them label significant events and give approximate years when those things took place (examples: graduating from school, joining the military, birth of a child, loss of a parent, career change). Prepare a graph of your own before class. Have learners work quickly.

Ask for volunteers to share a low point, but don't put anyone on the spot. Be prepared to share one of your own. Discuss emotions experienced at those points, whether the volunteer was tempted to give up, and what kept him or her going.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Famous Failures" activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students complete it in small groups.

After either activity, transition to the Bible lesson by saying, "Sometimes life seems painful, unproductive, or even humdrum. Though Peter may have doubted his value as a follower and representative of Jesus, this appearance of the risen Lord would have dispelled those thoughts."

Into the Word

Divide the class into three groups. Supply each group with a marker, sheets of paper, and one of the following assignments. Groups are to read portions of today's text and create "thought bubbles" to explore potential thoughts of the people in that text. Some possible responses follow.

Group 1—John 21:1-5

Peter: *I'm not sure what the future holds, so I'm going to clear my head by going fishing.*

Disciples: *What else do we have to do? Let's go with Peter!*

Group 2—John 21:6-9

Disciples when told where to cast their nets: *Who is that who thinks he knows our business?*

The "disciple whom Jesus loved" (John): *Nobody could do this but Jesus!*

Group 3—John 21:10-14

Jesus: *They still need to believe that I have risen.*

Any disciple: *Somebody should say something, but it won't be me!*

After groups have created two or three thought bubbles each, work through the lesson text as a class. First, have a member of Group 1 read [verses 1-5](#) slowly. At appropriate points, have group members hold up a thought bubble. Explore the possible mind-sets of Peter and the other disciples regarding their uncertainty about what the future held.

Repeat this process with Group 2 and [verses 6-9](#). Compare and contrast the text with the similar situation in [Luke 5:1-11](#).

Repeat this process with Group 3 and [verses 10-14](#). Note that the disciples' full understanding of the implications of the resurrection was still incomplete and would remain so at least until the ascension (use [Acts 1:6](#) as evidence for incomplete understanding). Point out that eating a meal with the disciples proved that Jesus was not a ghost or vision (compare [Luke 24:39-43](#)).

After this activity, ask, "When feeling lost, where do people find purpose and direction? The disciples discovered (and had to rediscover) that Jesus was the one who could provide both."

Into Life

Ask students to review the graphs created at the beginning of the lesson, if you used that activity. Invite them to discuss times when they sensed the presence of God strongly and how that presence affected them.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Forever Faithful" activity. Have students work individually or in small groups to personalize Scriptures that describe the faithfulness of our Lord. After either activity, have students write prayers of commitment to trust in Jesus' provision always.