

# OVER THE TOP

John 21: 1-14

K Karpen, Sunday, May 7<sup>th</sup> , 2006

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Oh, I love this story. Partly I love it because, even though the story concerns an appearance by a post-resurrection risen Christ, there is something deeply, unfailingly human about it, right?

Friends fishing together, talking together and eating breakfast together. There is really nothing spiritual going on at all in this story, except that is its all going on with a person who was supposed to be dead and now he is talking, joking, cooking, and eating. It is a very human tale and I love it. I love it, in part, because it is over the top.

First of all, as I pointed out a couple of weeks ago, the Gospel of John gives us five post-resurrection appearances by Jesus. That is more than the other three Gospels put together. That's over the top!

Second, a verse or two before this story starts, the writer of John tells us he is all done. "Jesus did many other signs which are not written in this book. And now here comes more. Here comes this story kind of as a post-script, because he can't stand not telling us one more cool story. Here comes one more story because there is always more to tell; because the end is never the end. Because where Jesus is concerned, the writer of John just can't help being over the top.

Third, there is Peter. Peter. Peter is just an over the top kind of guy. He doesn't start the story over the top. No, at the start of the story, Peter seems a little depressed. He is back in Gallilee. He's back upstate after all the excitement and trauma of the city. He is hanging out with six of his friends and he tells them, "I am going fishing." Nothing is really remarkable about that, right? What was this guy before Jesus found him? A fisherman. What did he know how to do? Fish. What do you think he's going to now that Jesus is gone? Nothing is over the top about that. They all go fishing and they stay out all night, but they catch nothing.

Now, I grew up with my father, a man who loves to fish. He used to fish every chance he could get; be it morning, noon, or night. Ninety-nine percent of the time, he could nothing! But, he didn't seem to care. I remember one time running down the shore of the lake as he was docking the boat and asking, "What did you catch?" He looked at me as though I had somehow misunderstood the point of this fishing business.

But that's not so for Peter. He and the other don't stay out on the water all night for nothing. They go fishing all night because that's when you catch fish on the Sea of

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Gallilee and because it's a great idea to sell your catch at the morning markets. But they catch nothing. But then along comes Jesus. He says, "Children, you have not fish, have you?" He's making fun of them, but gently and with affection. And he tells them how to fish. That's only funny because what do these guys do for a living again? Fish! What did Jesus do for a living? The guy was a carpenter. Go figure. But it works! Soon the net is full of fish. 153 of them, we learn from John. Just in case you were curious.

When John tells Peter that it is Jesus standing on the shore telling them how to fish, Peter goes over the top. He is a wild man all of a sudden. He is Tom Cruise on the couch. He puts on his clothes, quickly because he is fishing naked. He throws on his clothes, he jumps over the top of the gunwale, flops into the water, and starts swimming to shore. There he was ready to return to his old secure boring life and Jesus sends him over the top.

One of my commentaries refers to all this as Peter's "buffoonish enthusiasm." It is looked at in contrast to the rest of rational behavior of the rest of the group who row calmly back to the shore. I have a little feeling that "buffoonish enthusiasm" is the rock upon which the church was supposed to be built. When did we start to take ourselves so seriously?

When the disciples make it to shore, Jesus speaks to them with what I suppose are the sweetest words in scripture: "Come and have breakfast."

Jesus has been busy on the shore. He has lit a charcoal fire. He's cleaned and cooked some fish. He's found some bread and made some toast. This might seem a little over the top, but he's just doing what he's always doing...taking care of people, feeding people, and loving people.

The writer of John says, "Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them and did the same with the fish. It's a poignant scene and to me it evokes the Last Supper. I've always wondered if sometimes we ought to substitute for the Last Supper, the last breakfast, a sacramental, holy, human moment when Jesus gives himself again and again and again to people he loves; to people he wishes would embody his love.; to people he wishes would carry his love to a loveless world.

In that moment, any such moments, I would pray to feel and to know a love so powerful, so unquestionable, so over the top that it would send us all over the top.

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And the Church, the whole Church founded upon the rock of buffoonish enthusiasm would become full of a buffoonish enthusiasm for life.