Today’s gospel lesson is the story of someone who walks away from it all: the apostle Peter. He walks away from his commercial fishing job. Remarkably, this is the second time the gospels describe Peter walking away from that job. The first time is in Luke 5:1-11, when after a long day of unsuccessful fishing, Jesus invites Peter (then called Simon) to take him out in his boat for one last try. The net comes back bursting with fish, and Jesus says to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.” Simon, with his partners James and John, rows to shore. Immediately, they leave everything and follow Jesus.

John’s gospel has a different take on Simon’s calling, but it also involves a resignation (John 1:35-42). In this version, Simon is a follower of John the Baptist. His brother Andrew tells him, “We have found the Messiah,” and recruits Simon away from John’s band of followers to take up with Jesus instead. Jesus immediately changes Simon’s name to Peter. Clearly, this resignation is about a lot more than just changing jobs; it is swapping one life for another.

**Back to the Nets, For a While.** The passage in John 21 opens with the words, “After these things…” The “things” John refers to are the death and resurrection of Jesus. From the highs of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem to the lows of Calvary, to the glad and unexpected news of the Easter rising, Peter and his companions have seen it all. Considering these “things,” Peter’s next remark sounds like the biggest *non sequitur* of all time: “I’m going fishing.” Really,Peter? Fishing? Peter is already part of one great resignation, now he is drifting back to the fishing nets he once willingly abandoned.

What happens next is reminiscent of the first calling of Peter. Jesus does not get into Peter’s boat this time; he stands along the shore as Peter and his mates row back, discouraged. After a long night of fishing, they have sore backs and heavy hearts, but no fish. “Children, you have no fish, have you?” It is a question, but also a statement. Maybe Jesus observes the empty boat riding high in the water. Or maybe he just knows, from the drooping of the men’s shoulders as they row, that this is a failed fishing expedition.

When they admit their lack of fish, Jesus gives them a tip: cast your net on the right side of the boat. This is a crazy piece of advice. Why should the side of the boat matter? Crazy or not, these seasoned mariners take his advice, and when they do, the net comes back so full, they fear it will break. This is the moment when it dawns on the disciples that this man is the Risen Christ. Peter is so excited to see Jesus that he dives into the sea to reach Jesus. When all the disciples are back on the beach, they have breakfast: fish grilled over charcoal, with bread. Their impromptu meal is reminiscent of another meal, recently shared with Jesus: The Last Supper. Maybe we should call this meal “the First Breakfast,” for it takes place at daybreak rather than night, in joy rather than solemnity, in hope rather than fear.

After breakfast, Jesus turns to Simon and asks, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” It is not exactly clear what Jesus means by the word “these.” Maybe Jesus is asking Peter whether Peter loves Jesus more than these other disciples love Jesus. Or maybe Jesus is asking if Peter loves Jesus more than Peter loves the other disciples. Or maybe Jesus is asking Peter whether Peter loves Jesus more than Peter loves his fishing nets. We cannot say for sure what Jesus means by his question, but we do know how Peter responds. He leaves his boats and his nets behind, for the second time, and embarks on the life of an apostle. From this day forward, Peter will fulfill the challenge Jesus sets before him: “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” “Feed my lambs…Tend my sheep…Feed my sheep.”

**Have You Any Fish?** “Children, have you any fish?” Jesus might ask that question of us. There we would be, taking care of business, arms full of groceries, fingers on the keyboard, hands on the steering wheel, drumming out the rhythm of our lives. “Have you any fish?” Jesus wants to know. Jesus does not ask the sort of questions the world asks to define success. He does not ask: “Are you pulling in a paycheck?” “Did you achieve a level of professional competence, commensurate with your years of experience?” “Are you able to finance the type of leisure activities you want?” “Will you be able to retire early?” Jesus looks at the big picture and asks us a single, simple question. “Have you any fish?”

When Jesus cups hands to mouth and shouts, “Have you any fish?” Peter already knows the answer. Peter knows his net is, and forever will remain,*empty*. The enticements of this world are fleeting. The metaphorical “fish” of power and glory and fame and fortune will fade. The literal “fish” will be sold or eaten. Nothing lasts, except the new life that Jesus offers. Paradoxically, it is only when our nets are truly empty that we are most receptive to the message Jesus has for us. “Lord, to whom shall we go?” Peter asked on an earlier occasion when Jesus challenged his faithfulness. “For you have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

This is an Easter faith, and it grows best in the fertile soil of utter desperation. It thrives in those bleak moments when there is no place else to turn. The net must be empty, the wine exhausted, the tomb sealed, before we are inclined to let the Jesus take the wheel. We must acknowledge that our cup is empty before God fills it to overflowing. A wise teacher said, “The Lord doesn’t ask about your ability, only your availability; and, if you prove your dependability, the Lord will increase your capability.” Martin Luther put it like this: “I have held many things in my hands and have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess.”

**Walking Away from a Full Net.** When Peter realized who it was who filled his net, he leaped from his fishing boat into the water. So eager was he to leave behind the futile striving of his old occupation that he did not mind getting wet. He went with Jesus, he walked away from it all: boat, sail, oars, family, friends, and that net bursting with fish. Peter and the others left their nets to follow Jesus three years before; but this time is different. This time Peter leaves behind a net that is *full*, a net filled by the sheer grace of God, made present in Jesus Christ. Then, Peter left his nets because he thought Jesus *might* be the real deal; now he walks away from his nets because he *knows* that Jesus is the only way, that Jesus is God’s truth, and that Jesus is new and eternal life. Peter is so convinced and so compelled to share this great, good news that he will never return to his fishing boat again.

There is an old Jewish story about a rabbi walking through a neighboring village late at night. He encounters another man walking alone, and together the two of them walk down the street in silence. Finally, the rabbi turns to his companion and asks, “So, who do you work for?” “I work for the village,” the man answers. “I’m the night watchman.” They walk on some more, in silence. Then it is the night watchman’s turn to ask this newcomer to his village, “And who do *you* work for?” The rabbi answers: “I’m not always sure. But this I will tell you. Name your present salary, and I’ll double it. All you must do, to earn that extra money, is one thing. You must walk with me from time to time and ask me, ‘Who do you work for?’”

Each one of us needs someone to ask us, from time to time, “Who do you work for?” We could all use someone to meet us on the beach and challenge us to declare, truthfully, if our nets are empty or full. Then, in those moments, we may have the courage to leave it all behind, to walk away from it all, and to obey Jesus’ command to “Follow me!”

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for seeing beyond the limitations of our everyday, human lives; and for healing us, opening our eyes, empowering us, and sending us out to new adventures in your name. Help us to say with Peter, “You know everything, Lord, you know that I love you,” and then to step out boldly where you are leading. Amen.

**Source:** Greg Jaffe, “‘It’s a walkout!’ Inside the fast-food workers’ season of rebellion,” *The Washington Post*, November 6, 2021. https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/interactive/2021/rebellion-mcdonalds-bradford-pa/. Retrieved November 6, 2021.

**Walking Away From It All**

Sunday, May 1, 2022 [John 21:1-19](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+21%3a1-19&language=en&version=NIV)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Dustin Snyder was the assistant general manager of a McDonald’s restaurant in Bradford, PA. Tired of the long work weeks, low wages, and grumpy customers, Dustin drafted a petition to the regional office and invited his workers to sign it. “We are all leaving,” the petition stated, “and hope you find employees that want to work for $9.25 an hour.” Nearly all the 24 day-shift employees added their names, because they knew that, just 20 miles away, employees at a McDonald’s across the border in New York State did identical work, receiving that state’s $15-an-hour minimum wage. It wasn’t a strike. It wasn’t a protest. To Dustin and his fellow employees, it was a simple statement of fact.

Dustin faxed the petition to the regional office and moments later his phone rang. It was the regional supervisor asking, “Why did you do it?” “I was trying to get better pay for my people,” answered Dustin. “There are better ways to go about this,” chided the supervisor. “No one gets a raise,” she told him, “If your workers don’t like it, they can quit.” So, they did. Nearly all of them. On the spot. They took off their headsets and abandoned their stations at the drive-through and cash registers. Mystified customers watched Dustin lock the building and hang a sign on the door: “Due to lack of pay we all quit.”

When Dustin told Stephanie, the store’s general manager, she was sympathetic. In fact, she texted the night shift about the petition, and told them that she, too, was quitting. Most of the night shift did too. Dustin and Stephanie spent the next few days helping their workers find better jobs. As for the Bradford McDonald’s, it was up and running soon again. The franchise owner also owned the store across the border in New York. He bussed in $15-an-hour workers from that location to re-open the drive-through, then hired a whole crew of new employees from Pennsylvania. But he had to do it for $10 an hour, giving his new workers the 75-cent raise he denied to his former employees.

**The Great Resignation.** The Bradford McDonald’s walkout was not, strictly speaking, a labor action. It was not an act of collective bargaining. It was not planned out in advance. But it is an example of what economists are calling The Great Resignation. In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, workers across America, professionals as well as shift workers, are rethinking the work they do. In some cases, they decide to walk away from it, sometimes to new jobs, and other times to no jobs at all.