

Swedenborgian Sunday School Notes for the Revised Common Lectionary

John 21:1–19 • Feed My Lambs

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John 21:1–19 Feed my lambs
Revelation 5:11–14 Worthy is the Lamb

Overview

Our story is about Jesus' third and final appearance to the disciples after the resurrection, as told in the Gospel of John. There are two events in our reading: the big catch of fish, and Jesus asking Peter to "feed my lambs." Together, they are about learning under the Lord's guidance, and teaching others what we have learned—not from mere intellectual knowledge or from a sense that we "know it all," but from feelings of *love* and *kindness* toward people.

Key Points

- If we "fish" for understanding and love according to the Lord's guidance, we will have a great catch!
- If we want to teach people what is right, we have to love them and care about them first.
- The Lord not only forgives us for the wrong things we do, but even asks us, and trusts us, to carry the message of love and forgiveness to others.

Example for Teaching Children

In our story today, the Lord appears to his disciples for the third time after he rose from the dead. Do you remember who saw him the first two times, and where? (*Mary Magdalene at the tomb, the disciples in a locked room in Jerusalem.*) Where do the disciples see him in today's story? What are they doing?

Have you ever gone fishing? Sometimes you sit there for a long time and don't catch anything. The disciples had fished all night, and hadn't caught a single fish. It must have been frustrating! Then, early in the morning, they saw a man on the shore who said they would catch some fish if they threw their net on the *right* side of the boat. They did, and they caught lots of fish! Although they didn't realize it at first, it was Jesus who had helped them catch all those fish.

The Lord can help us find what we are looking for, too. Do you ever feel frustrated and wish things were different than they are? Maybe you don't think people like you as much as they like someone else, or maybe you can't figure out why some people are mean to you. If we listen to what the Lord tells us, we will start learning that no matter what anyone else thinks of us, the Lord loves us so much that we can't even imagine it! We will also realize that the more

we love and care about other people, and the more are kind to them, the happier we will feel.

That is why Jesus keeps asking Peter whether he loves him. Peter liked to teach people about Jesus, but Jesus knows that we are best at teaching people when we love them, not when we think we are smarter or better than they are.

For example, if you see your friends doing something wrong, and you yell, "Cut it out, you stupid idiots!" do you think they will listen? They will probably just get mad and start yelling right back at you. But if you are really worried about them, and you say, "Hey, that's dangerous! Please don't do it. I don't want you to get hurt!" they might listen, since they know you are saying it because you care about them. Jesus wants us to help other people to see what is right because we *love* them and *care* about them.

Basic Correspondences

the catch of fish = our ability to teach people
fishing nets = our spiritual beliefs
right side of boat = teaching others from kindness
lambs = innocence
sheep = kindness

Thoughts from Swedenborg

The Lord appeared while the disciples were fishing because "fishing" means teaching the knowledge of truth and goodness, and reforming people in this way. He told them to "cast the net on the right side of the boat," meaning that everything should come from the good of love and kindness. "The right side" symbolizes the goodness that all things should come from. To the extent that our knowledge comes from goodness, it is alive, and it grows and multiplies.

Apocalypse Explained #513c.16

"Peter" symbolizes faith. Yet faith is not faith unless it comes from kindness toward others—which means that it comes from loving the Lord. Also, kindness and love are not kindness and love unless they come from innocence. That is why the Lord first asks Peter whether he loves him—meaning whether there is love within his faith—and then says, "Feed my lambs," meaning "teach people who are innocent." Then, after asking the same question again, he says, "Feed my sheep," meaning "teach people who are kind."

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