

Christ Community Church
Sept. 29, 2024 sermon

I want to tell Brenda and to thank you all for how kind you have been to us for over 30 years. When we came here and were about to leave for Ghana, we were shaking because we just didn't know what to do or where to start, but you have been with us. And just this spring, you have sent your pastor to help us to train the pastors that we are dealing with because our churches are growing so much for us to keep up. So he came and really gave us a hand to train the pastors. We are so grateful to you who are new and to those who started with us over 30 years ago. Thank you so much, thank you very much. Thank you. I'll leave it here, maybe after the service then I can thank you more, I want to thank you more. It's soothing to us to have you here in Bloomington. It seems our car even, when we are coming here, our car even wants to rush to get to Bloomington because of your love and your faithfulness to us.

Thank you, Brenda, for reading this Scripture. The Scripture means a lot to me. It presents so many things that have touched my life, and I hope I can say a few of those that have touched my life to you this morning as well. When I was about 13 years old, my uncle, the one--those of you who have read my book--the one that was so cruel that I had to run away from him. I had to escape from the village of Yaara. I hope you are [understanding] my intonation. When I get excited, it gets worse. So just try and keep along with my because my heart is always excited to speak about God's gospel. Because, the gospel of God, the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ, brings relief. It gives us the reason to live. Amen? And so I'm always excited and my children will say, "Dad, people don't even understand you today so when you get excited they lose you completely. And I'm trying not to do that this morning because I want you to hear this.

That when I was about 13 my uncle would take me to the river, the Black Volta River, that you just saw. In the night, the night fishing is better because it is in the night; the fish roam freely trying to look for food. In the afternoon they go by their [] and hide, but in the night they come out and roam freely and fisherman can get them easier. And that is why this renowned fisherman like Peter was going out fishing in the night. But night fishing also comes with dangers. That's when you have cold; it's very cold in the night. You also have all the release of insects in the night onto your body. I had a little pair of pants, not even trousers, so all the insects would be at my back, biting, as you hold your paddle, trying to paddle. So you can imagine that—you can imagine, these disciples, there were seven of them that went out to the Sea of Tiberias to fish in the night. They had fished the whole night, and they were coming to the shore empty. But I want to tell you this morning that life on this earth is a very trying one and sometimes unfair. Picture it and the life that we live. Brenda and I, our eyes have been turned to looking at people who have gone into the ocean to fish all the night and coming back empty. And I bet you anything that this morning in this congregation here, there are a lot that have gone to fish in the night and are coming back to dock empty. Some families, students...so many issues. You've done your very best. You've done it all, you've tried it all. You worked hard, and yet you're coming back to dock empty. You just don't know what to do anymore. You tried. Last week, I mean last month, I went to see some girls that we were building a dormitory for. These girls, when our students, when girls come up above secondary school you know they have really studied hard. But these girls were living at places where men were taking advantage of them because they had no rooms to stay. They were pairing with men; that's why we built that dormitory for them, so that we keep them there from these predators so that they can study. They have studied, they have worked hard in school. Now for them to sit in their class and learn, they are coming empty—men are taking advantage of them. We see this over and over

again—that the world is just such a place that many are coming in...they have worked hard and they are coming in just still sad—nothing in the boat.

If you're that kind of a person, as I have been, well, just listen to the things that are coming next. If anything is crippling you, that you've done your very best and yet things stay the same, don't quit. Amen? Now, amen is not a bad word, so when you're going to say it, say it properly. Amen? Ah, that's it. That's what I want to hear. In the name of the Lord Jesus, we will not come empty. In the name of the Lord, the God of Hosts—whatever is facing you, that your boat, you are coming without fish, the Lord will make sure that you come and dock with fish. Amen? So there's sadness in the world, but there's also encouragement in Jesus. So these disciples, they are coming and the Lord is turning at the back of the Sea of Tiberias. He's standing at the shore and watching them coming sad and empty and cold, bitten by insects, tortured by the waves of Tiberias. Same thing at the Sea of Galilee. And he's watching them coming, and he asks them a question: "Have you got fish?" The translation says, "Friends, do you have fish?" The Greek doesn't call them friends, it called them *paidiá*. *Paidiá* means "children". My children. It's a [more] affectionate word than "friends". Children, my children, [do] you have fish. Well, they were empty, and they were already annoyed...you see the answer? They just said, "No!" If you look at the text, they just said, "No!" They took Jesus to be someone standing at the shore, wanting to buy fish from them, and they have empty, empty nets, empty boat, so they just said, "No, we don't have fish." Don't ever be annoyed with Jesus. When we are getting into problems, we get annoyed with the pastor, we get annoyed with the church, we get annoyed with believers...we don't have to do that. It's an affectionate word, but Jesus really was concerned—just like when you tell your daughter or your son, you will ask them, when you come from a journey you will say, "Have you eaten? Have you got any food to eat? Did you eat?" That's exactly what Jesus was doing to them. "Children, *paidiá*, have you had fish?" He knows that they didn't have fish, but he still asked them "Have you got fish" because he wanted to show them a lesson. "Have you got fish?" And they were annoyed. "No."

We don't say no to Jesus because he loves us. Jesus cares for us. And then he tells them, cast—they don't have fish, he knows that—cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat. Now, if you haven't fished before, if you haven't sat in a canoe to fish before, you won't understand what is going on because if you are in the canoe and you are going, fisherman normally throw the net on the left-hand side. That is the normal thing. Any good fisherman knows that, that you [___] with your thing, hold it, and throw it. So it's always the left-hand side and throw it. But Jesus says, "Throw it at the right-hand side." Now, for whoever was holding that net had to turn around to be able to cast it at the right-hand side. We need, from time to time, to just agree with Jesus and turn around. Amen? We need to just not say, "What I am doing is the best. My mind is the best, nobody else. I am where it is, that's how it's going to be. No one's going to change me. I'm going to do that, I'm going to do that. You take it or you leave it." Well, you—you will dock empty. But you turn around and you hear Jesus, and cast it. I'm sure, whether it was Peter holding the net, or whoever it is, will say, "Why is he saying that? Why do I have to do that?" Well you have to do that in Christ we turn around, turn the net.

What I want to say this morning is this: That it is our duty, you and I, it is our duty to ask questions like Jesus did: "Have you eaten?" Have you been asking people like that in the church, in the house, in the school? "Have you eaten?" Somebody that is suffering that you know, that you go there and say, "Can I lend a hand?"

And this is what we've been doing for these past years, that we look at people like Jesus and ask, "What can we do?" And your church has been doing that a lot. You've been looking at us and asking us, "Have you eaten? Have your people eaten? How can I help?" It is our duty to do that. Jesus asked them, and Jesus provided. What God has given to us we need to be able to provide. We need not just so ask, as Jesus said, go...as people says, "Yeah, you go in peace" and yet you have it. You haven't been doing that. I shouldn't be preaching this sermon even here this morning. But when we have, when we are able, we tell others, "Cast it this way and bring fish in." When we are able, when God has blessed us, that we show others how to bring fish home. We've been doing that and I want to do that until the Lord calls me. That day in and day out I go out into the communities, where people are completely poor, where people cannot have meals, where students cannot go to school, where textbooks are not available, where medical services are not available, that we will say "Cast it on the right-hand side, and you will have something." You and I, that's our call, that's our call—to be able to see people as they are, "*Paidiá*, have you eaten? I have this to give to you."

I think I should be closing. If I had, if it were in Ghana, I'm beginning to be warmed up to preach. But, when Jesus drew them in... My closing for you is this: When Jesus drew them in after giving them the fish, at the shore there, there was fire, there was fish, and there was bread. As you read, as Brenda read for us, there was fire, there was fish, there was bread, and that's what is prepared for them. Why was there fire? The Bible took time to mention that very nicely. The reason was that they were cold to begin with. So when they docked, the very first thing there would have been was to go by the fire and warm themselves. Warming themselves by the fire Jesus has made. And they were hungry overnight; the whole night they didn't eat anything, so he had fish there for them. And then he has bread. Very simple meal: protein and carbohydrates and heat. Very simple. If we are going to be able to help others, if we are going to be able to be meaningful, we have to learn to be content with simple meals. Hallelujah? We have to be content and not to be asking for the desserts, or this and that and this and that. (You know I'm not talking about just desserts, I'm just talking about something deeper. You know that.) If we can't be content with what you North Americans have, you cannot serve God. You have to be content with the warmth, the fish, and the bread. Simple recipe. Now and then, I will take off one of my smocks and see a really suffering farmer and say, "Here, here, here is a smock for you." Or my pants. Those that I like very much, when I'm going to give them out, my heart is saying, "Oh, David. Are you sure?" But I have to stay with the simple meal: warmth, fish, and bread. And when we do that, we are able for someone to point to us and say, "That is Jesus." Hallelujah? Somebody will look at us and say, "That is Jesus." And that's why Muslims are coming to know Christ through our work. They look at us and say, "That person is different. He's Jesus." And that's what John did. John knows Jesus really well, more than the rest of the disciples. Jesus' kindness, the way he sees people, the way he does things—how they were wretched in that boat and how Jesus' gave them plenty of fish already. He looked at the fish, the way they got it, and he told the seven of them and said "I bet that's Jesus." Hallelujah. These people have to look at us, the way we act, the way we do things, and say "That is Jesus." We don't normally preach too much when we go to communities. They see how we do, the fish we give them, clothes we give them, education we give them, health we bring at their door, and they said, "They are Jesus' people. They come to church." Forty-nine churches we have started with you, and most of them is just simply being content, Brenda and I feel content with warmth, bread, and fish.

A prayer I'm leaving with you, that the way you have started—that you continue with it, that the Lord would be very happy with us at the end, because he's given us resources to be able to also ask those questions. "Are you hungry? Are you hungry?"

My final thing... I told you there was a final one, but this is the final thing. This is really final, and I'm done. One Friday I picked up an imam, the head of a Muslim group. Friday I thought this guy was going to a mosque, so I stopped and picked him. And we were driving him. Friday, that's their big time of worship. As we went along, he looked at me and he said, "You are dolo-dolo, aren't you?" That's the way they call us in Tamale, they call Christians dolo-dolo. And I said, "Yeah, I'm a dolo-dolo." I actually don't know the meaning of the dolo-dolo, but that's what they call us. So I said, "Yeah, I'm a dolo-dolo." So then I ask him, "Why do you know that I'm a dolo-dolo?" He said to me, "The way you stopped the car. The way you opened the door for me just told me that you are a dolo-dolo because no Muslim man will stop like that and pick me, the way you did." Just that simple gesture changed a man's whole attitude.

Now, there's a man in this congregation that I'm so glad that I cannot recognize who you are, but when we came here and we mentioned about the hospital... The hospital was \$10 million, by the time we finished it was \$14 million. When the engineers first asked me in Ghana how much the hospital is going to be, I said I think it's going to be about \$500,000. That's what I said. And then when the engineers, the architect, they all finished, they looked at me and the guy who did it is called Frank from Ohio—there are 14 of them—they finished and then they looked at it and I was curious and I went to him and said "How much is this going to cost?" He said, "You're looking at \$10 million plus." The saliva in my mouth turned like battery water. I just thought, "Ten million? How are we going to get \$10 million to build a hospital?" The we came here, in this church. I wish... Now, if you are here, you talked to me when we came here the last time, when we were going to build the hospital. Please identify yourself to me. Because we finished the service and we were going and then Brenda came alongside with me and we walked around, and he said, "David, we're going to build a hospital." That's all that he told me. He said that hospital will be built. Now I don't know, this brother, if you are here, whether you contributed or you didn't contribute, but that word that you told me that day...you don't know how it meant to me. It was like asking me, "*Paidiá*, have you had food?" I left this place just saying, "Yeah, that brother said we will build the hospital." He said we will build it. It was like some confirmation. So let me know who you are. "*Paidiá*, have you had any food?" It was like he was asking me that. It is our duty to encourage one another, work with one another, and look how the Lord has blessed it. The Lord bless you. Continue to ask, "Have you eaten?" Amen.