The following is Bishop Johnson's sermon that he preached at the 2010 Minneapolis Area Synod Assembly Opening Worship on April 23, 2010 at Central Lutheran Church, Minneapolis.

Living in the state of Minnesota there is no other state in this country that appreciates and grasps fishing stories better than us Minnesotans. Even though our state is peppered with honest hard working Lutheran people we all are given a pass when we exaggerate about our fishing.

Are you ready for my fish story? Are you sure?

My youngest son and I were fishing with my brother at his cabin north of McGregor in Aitkin County. As all of you know, fishing is a "dog eat dog" enterprise. The person who catches the most or biggest or first fish wins. It can be bloody competition. Isn't it interesting how humankind can ruin a wonderful pass time?

I grew up on Chisago Lake in the St. Paul Area Synod territory. I fished almost every night of the summer by myself. I had two lures that were spectacular. One I will tell you about—the other I will take to my grave.

The one I will tell you about is an old time lure. Overlooked and underestimated—kind of the story of my life as a middle child. The lure is the red and white "Bassarino". You may chuckle as my wife does not quite grasp why a fish would bite at this thing. And yet I have more teeth marks on my Bassarino than any other plug in the tackle box.

Well up in Aitkin County, with my brother, I prepared for the competition, and bought a brand new "Bassarino", no marks, and beautiful finish. My son and my brother shook their heads in arrogant disdain as I brought it out. What I have found in my fishing life is that fish can't read. They do not know that this lure was made particularly for bass. Northern pike, walleye and dog fish all have succumbed to my Bassarino.

So on this beautiful morning I cast out the great new unblemished plug, two and three casts, nothing then cast number four, I looked in the water during my retrieve; a big walleye was following the "Bassarino" my brother said it was five pounds at least. I say 15. The great fish was poised to strike.

As my brother and son were breathlessly watching, I got scared. I inexplicably pulled the beautiful lure out of the water and away from harm. If you could have seen the look on the faces of those two people. If you could imagine a look of utter puzzlement and confusion. The only personal defense I could think of is that I was scared for my "Bassarino".

This Gospel lesson (John 21:1-19) is not just another fish story but a prophetic, apostolic and missional miracle of abundance. Luther believed that these miracles in the New Testament are glimpses into the resurrection life. They are teaching moments from God that can be seen; moments of grace spilling into our lives and overwhelming us with the goodness of God and the abundance of grace surrounding us.

God has put an abundance of people from all over the world in our local lake of Minneapolis and Saint Paul. Did we get scared of the stranger? Were we afraid that they would change us too dramatically? Did we decide to keep our church unblemished and protected zipped up? Did we pull our churches out of being evangelical? Did we invite - really invite people into our community of faith?

In the 1950s, '60s and '70s, our congregations in the city were burgeoning. People were flocking to them. In fact other denominations, particularly evangelicals, were looking to us and seeing the denomination of the future in the United States. We had colleges, hospitals, nursing homes, social service agencies, missionaries, camping and youth ministry. We seemed to have it all in many peoples' minds.

Then the great emigration to the suburbs occurred and a whole new wave of our congregations began exploding in membership in the suburbs. That is still happening in many of our congregations, but not all. And the burgeoning of our congregations in the city in most cases has leveled and dwindled sometimes to a trickle and in many we have dwindled immensely. Why?

Some of the answer might be that we did not see the people who were moving into our neighborhoods as people to “gather in” to our communities of faith. We tried to feed sheep but only the sheep of our choosing. Our focus shifted from welcome and integration to maintenance, protection and the security of the known. Were we afraid that newcomers might somehow mar or change what we loved?

I am here to say this about that. We are called to risk the marring or change of our congregations for the sake of the people just as Jesus was marred for our sake. Feed my sheep!

The great commission of our Lord was to go and make disciples of all nations. To feed my sheep. Did we see our role as making disciples only of a cluster of nations with which we were most comfortable? Just as I pulled the plug out of the water in Aitkin County, anxious about my beautiful “Bassarino”. Did we remove ourselves from the great task of welcoming the stranger and instead uphold principals of a particular church culture over and above the needs of God’s people that surround us.

In our Synodical Inreach, headed by synod staff members, Pastor David Wangaard and Robera Battal, we interviewed hundreds and hundreds of our people. A number of themes emerged that our members believed that we should be about most in our church work. One of them is courageous discipleship. And another related theme that came up over and over again was we must be about building a racially diverse church.

As Jesus looked at Peter and pressed him three times I ask you to hear those words as litany for us. Do you love your Lord Christ? If so answer “Yes Lord, you know that I love you.” Then – feed my sheep. Do you love your Lord Jesus? If so answer “Yes Lord, you know that I love you.” Feed my lambs. Do you love Christ our Lord? If so answer “Lord you know everything, you know that I love you.”

Feed my sheep. Do not be afraid. Follow your Lord. Let us pray that we have the courage to risk the probable changing of our congregations for the sake of the people and for the sake of Christ. Let us together reach out to the rich diverse people that are God’s gift to us. Amen.