

The Same Jesus

John 21

Turn to John 21, last chapter of John. This is Easter Sunday. As Christian celebrations go, this day towers over all the others. It cannot be separated from our Lord's death on Friday; but still, our faith rests overwhelmingly on the empty tomb on Sunday, and on the resurrection of Jesus.

I preached John 20 on Easter Sunday a few times, but never John 21. So today, John 21. John 20 records the first two appearances of our Lord. John 21 tells us the third. Let's read.

*21:1 - Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.*

*Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.*

*Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.*

*Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.*

*When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Tend my sheep." The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep.*

*Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!”*

*Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord, who is going to betray you?”) When Peter saw him, he asked, “Lord, what about him?”*

*Jesus answered, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You follow me.” Because of this, the rumor spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?”*

John 20 ended the first resurrection appearances with Thomas’s remarkable confession. He said to Jesus: “My Lord and my God.” The whole Gospel of John was aimed at that, and this time Thomas was the first one to get it and say it. It is the high point of the resurrection appearances, and the high point of John. Jesus is Lord and God.

John 21 tells us something important, particularly because we have just learned that Jesus is our Lord and our God. John 21 tells us that this is the same Jesus. He does the same things, as before he died, and we follow him now just as they followed him before. John 21 covers different topics but always the same things as Jesus spoke about all along.

#### The Miraculous Catch of Fish – John 21:1-14

This story reminds us particularly of another Jesus story: the miraculous catch of fish in Luke 5. In Luke 5, Jesus was in the boat with Peter, and said “throw in your net.” Peter said, “Teacher, we fished all night and got nothing, but at your word, I will throw the net.” And he did.

And he caught a huge net full of fish, so many fish that the net was tearing, and he had to get his partners in the other boat, James and John, to help him. And on that day, they left their nets and boats and followed Jesus.

Here in John 21, after they got such a net full, John the beloved disciple said to Peter, “It’s the Lord.” Maybe he had better eyes to see who was on shore, but I think he had a better memory. This great catch, after bizarre advice, was too familiar. That could only be the Lord.

John assumes we know the story of Luke 5. My point today is that the resurrected Jesus, Lord and God, is the same Jesus, does the same things. And this time, John adds, the net did not tear!

I have to say, last year Mike took me walleye fishing near Hecla Island, which is as close as I will ever get to Luke 5 or John 21. We kept all we could, and I should have counted how many large fish he and I threw back! I'm not much of a fisherman, but that was a lovely day.

Back to John 21. That story reminds me of some other Jesus stories. How about the feeding of the 5,000 in John 6. There also Jesus provided a huge amount of food, all they needed, and more. It was the same menu, bread and fish, just like bread and fish when he fed the 5,000.

This reminds me of Jesus turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana, John 4, his first miracle in John. Generously providing all that was needed, and more.

And Jesus served them the food. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. He waited on them. This reminds me of Jesus washing the disciples feet, just before his arrest and trial. Before he was arrested he washed their feet, as a lowly servant.

Here, Jesus was the cook and the waiter, he made the food and he brought it to them. Folks, he's the same Jesus. He is indeed Lord and God. And, he is the same Jesus. In Luke 22 Jesus says, *Who is greater, the one who is eating at the table, or the one serving him? Is it not the one who is eating at the table? But I am here with you as one serving.* Before and after his resurrection.

Now Jesus will have an important talk with Peter. But first Jesus fed them. The minute their feet hit the shore, they could see it all ready: charcoal fire, fish, bread, all their and ready. After they had eaten came the important talk.

Do You Love Me? John 21:15-17

Picture Jesus having a conversation with you, and he asks you, "Do you love me?" Jesus shows up, later today, and he calls you by your full name, and he asks, "Do you love me?" How would that go? What would you say? Suppose you said "yes," and he asked you again, and you said "yes," and then he asked you a third time? After the third, I'd not be enjoying this.

There are two different Greek words for "love" in this conversation, but we should ignore that. John often goes back and forth between two words when he means the same thing. Even here, Jesus uses "lambs" and "sheep," but means the same people, and he uses "feed" and "tend," but means much the same thing. The difference is not important.

Jesus asked Peter three times, "Simon, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because he asked a third time. But Peter had denied the Lord three times, and in some way, Jesus was re-instating him. Jesus was somehow undoing the denials, and taking Peter back. Peter didn't get it at the time, but he probably did before long.

Notice how Jesus reinstated an apostle who had done a terrible thing. There was no penance. Peter did not have to lie face down in ashes for three days. He had to tell Jesus that he loved him.

Which for Peter was easy, he knew that he loved the Lord. After the third, he thought Jesus did not believe that he loved him, and that caused him pain.

And also this: Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep. If you love me Simon, take care of my people. Before he died, Jesus said, “If you love me, keep my commands. This is my command, that you love one another.” If you love me, show it by loving one another. If you love me Peter, feed my lambs. If you love me Peter, tend my sheep, feed my sheep.

Peter denied the Lord three times, and this conversation is a part of the healing in that relationship, and it also confirms Peter’s leadership role, in a very kind way. In this way the Lord makes clear that Peter shall be a shepherd, an overseer of the flock.

But notice this, too: Jesus himself just finished feeding his sheep. Feed my lambs. Feed my sheep. What happened just before this conversation? Jesus fed the disciples. “*When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.*” And later, “*Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.*”

Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Take care of them, Peter, as I did for you.

By Our Deaths We Glorify God – John 21:18-19

Imagine the Lord telling you how you were going to die. We all know that we will die, but we try not to think about it, even though we do think about it often enough. We don’t like the thought of it, but it is still there. So the Lord shows up and comes right out with it, he tells us how we will die, and it is not what we wanted to hear. Does not feel like good news.

What is clear is that Jesus is telling Peter how he would die, and that Peter did not like it. What kind of death Jesus means is not clear to us. But Peter got it, and was not pleased. This Scripture tells us, you and me, how to think about our deaths, and that’s good.

Jesus told Peter “*the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.*” Apparently many kinds of death would glorify God. That’s what we need to grab. For each of us, our particular way to die is a way to glorify God. Let’s view our own death like that. Dying is a way to glorify God. When we think about our own deaths, let’s say, “this will be my way to glorify God.”

Paul has a line like this too, in Php 1. *Now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.* We present our bodies to God as living sacrifices. We can exalt Christ with our bodies both by living, and by dying. *Now as always, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.*

Jesus also thought like this. In John 12 Jesus said, “*Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? But this hour is why I came. Father, glorify your name.*” We could pray this, when death looms: “Now **my** soul is troubled, and what shall **I** say? Father, save **me** from this hour? May **your** will be done, Father, use **my** death to glorify **your** name.”

Most of us do not know how we will die. What we do know is that it is a chance to bring glory to God, and to exalt Christ. Many followers of Christ have died in many different ways, and done just this. By the death of our bodies, we will glorify God and exalt Christ.

Jesus said, “*Follow me.*” This is the same thing Jesus has been saying all along. He still says, “follow me,” in Canada in 2021. Peter’s been following a long time, but the Lord still says, “Follow me, Peter.” The Risen Lord says, “follow me.” Following Christ includes death. The key to living well, and dying well, is to follow Jesus, died and risen.

If I Want Him to Live, What’s it to You? Follow Me - John 21:22-23

Twice in these verses we read, “*If I want him to remain alive.*” Let’s talk about “want,” what Peter wanted, and what the Lord wanted. Jesus told Peter, *When you were younger you dressed yourself and went where **you wanted**; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do **not want**.*

Then Jesus said, “*If **I want** something else for him, what is that to you? You follow me.*” Do you know believers who have easier lives than you have? You have to drink a cup they don’t have to drink. The Lord says to us, “*If **I want** something else for them, what is that to you? Follow me.*”

Peter might have said, “But Lord, I don’t **want** to die that way.” The Lord would have said, “I know that Peter, but this is what **I want** for you. You follow me.” Things happen to us that are not what we **want**. We don’t **want** this. Peter did not **want** this. But the Lord **wanted** it for Peter, and that’s how it would be with Peter.

This does not make Jesus hard hearted, people. He’s not asking anything of Peter that his Father did not ask of him. This is the same Jesus who thought about his own death, and said, “*And now my soul is troubled.*” He **wanted** to be saved from his hour of death, the Father **wanted** something else.

This is the same Jesus that arrived very early to make a fire, and bake some bread and some fish. The same Jesus who said, “Come, eat,” and who took bread and fish around and served these hungry men.

He is the same Jesus: he provides food for his followers, he serves us, he wants our love, he wants us to take care of each other. He talks to us about death, and life, and about bringing glory to his Father, and above all he wants us to keep following him. Same Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER: Jesus, our Lord and our God, Jesus with scars on your hands and your feet, there is a lot of comfort in this chapter. Mostly, Lord, you're the same. Jesus Christ, yesterday and today the same, and forever. Thank you for feeding those seven followers, thank you for your gentle way of bringing Peter back into his service for you. Thank you Lord for talking straight to him and to us about dying. Thank you for enduring a death you did not want. Thank you that we will all see the very same Jesus those seven saw on the shore. We will see you just like that, we will eat with you just like that, you will serve us just like that. It is a picture of the wedding supper to come. O Lord, we love you, you know we love you, and we want always to follow you. Thank you for bringing us into your flock, thank you for laying down your life for us, thank you that you're coming back. Come Lord Jesus. This taking too long. Far too long. Come Lord Jesus. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage our hearts and strengthen us in every good deed and word. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.