

John 21:1-25

Before I begin, I thought it would be beneficial to quickly review chapters 1-20. From Jan Wright's overview, we learned that the first half of John's gospel went deep into seven miraculous events or what are called "Signs" that point beyond themselves to something greater. Signs such as: the wedding at Cana, the healing of a man born blind, and feeding of the five thousand. These signs were meant to present evidence concerning the identity, purpose and power of Jesus. The second half of John's gospel focuses on Jesus and his disciples. John's writing helps us see, hear and feel the magnitude of God's love in Christ for the disciples and for us, through the Last Supper, Jesus' farewell teaching, his final prayer, his arrest, his trial, his crucifixion and his resurrection. So much was revealed to us in chapters 1-20.

A few weeks ago, Donna McLaughlin opened up her teaching asking if anyone enjoyed doing puzzles. I found that analogy so helpful as I sought to bring closure to the book of John. This chapter was a bit of a puzzle for me until I studied it and saw how these last pieces fit into the book as a whole.

After Jesus' resurrection, we learn that Jesus appeared to many people at different times. In verse 14 of our text today, we are told that this is the third time that Jesus revealed himself to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. What is so surprising is that John's last words to the whole world for all of time describe a beach scene with Jesus and his disciples. Don't get me wrong, being on a beach is my favorite place on earth! But a beach scene seems the most unlikely place to end such a massive theological book! Out of the 4 gospels, John is the only one to document this beach scene.

We know that John was an old man by the time he wrote this, roughly fifty years after Jesus was resurrected. Most of the commentators suggest that this last chapter was written sometime after the bulk of the book. That made me wonder why John circled back to include this scene? Several commentators actually called this chapter an epilogue. An epilogue is defined as a piece of text that is added to the end of a book, often giving a short statement about what happens to the characters. DA Carson says that this chapter was written to tie up some loose ends and point the way forward. So it seems that there are still a few pieces left to complete the puzzle.

What is the way forward for the disciples? And what are the puzzle pieces John is addressing here on the beach near the Sea of Galilee? The overarching purpose of this chapter is the disciples' call to mission or as Matthew's gospel calls it, "The Great

Commission". We know that part of the final chapters of Matthew, Mark and Luke were dedicated to Jesus calling his disciples to go out and take his message to the ends of the earth.

Jesus prepares his disciples for this mission in three ways. First, Jesus *Reassures* the Disciples, in verses 3-11. Second, Jesus *Refreshes* the Disciples, in verses 12-13. And third, Jesus *Restores* Peter, in verses 15-19.

Jesus Reassures the Disciples

We see from the opening verses of this passage that seven of the disciples are present at this encounter with Jesus. It is interesting that they are all from the Galilee region. Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, two unnamed disciples and the sons of Zebedee who are James and John (the author of this book). After the resurrection of Jesus, in two of the gospels, Matthew 28:7 and Mark 16:7, the disciples were told to go to Galilee and wait for Jesus there. So here we are, at the beach beside the sea of Galilee.

John 21:3-11, Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So, they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about 100 yards off.

When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." So, Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn".

At first glance, it may seem kind of odd that so many details would be shared about their fishing trip. To be practical, they did need to feed themselves. Besides, consider the week they had just been through... from the emotional high of Jesus riding on a donkey into Jerusalem amid cheers from the people, to the low of seeing their friend crucified, buried and then raised from the dead. Doing something familiar as they waited for what might come next, apparently made sense! Peter, being a man of action, says, "I am going fishing." And the other disciples follow suit.

In order to fully understand the significance of this scene, we have to go back to the beach scene from Luke, Chapter 5, when Jesus first called these disciples to follow him. There are many similarities between Luke 5:1-11 and here in John. In both scenes there is a boat, they fish all night and catch nothing. In both scenes Jesus tells them to throw the nets one more time. In both, there is a miraculous catch of fish.

But there are two stark differences between the two accounts. The first difference is Peter's reaction to Jesus. In Luke, Peter responds to the miraculous catch with *"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."* Whereas, in verse 7, John writes, *"When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea."* Does that sound like the earlier Peter who couldn't bear to look Jesus in the face? No, this was a changed Peter. He can't get close to Jesus fast enough.

Along with all of the disciples, Jesus had given them a new identity. Tim Keller states it this way, "Jesus is not a vitamin supplement. He will not simply make you a little better at the life you were already living. An encounter with Jesus will completely change your life and will give you a whole new agenda." Because of Jesus life death and resurrection, your new identity, your self-image, is not **achieved**, it is **received**. Galatians 2:20, *"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."*

This is the loose end that DA Carson was referring to. This is John's final important point, prompted by the Spirit. These disciples will be the very first preachers of the gospel. Most of them will suffer persecution and death as a result of their testimony about Jesus the Son of God. Jesus is reassuring his disciples that what they saw and experienced was not a mirage. That his life death and resurrection really did happen. As John said to Peter from the boat, "It is the Lord!"

Bruce Milne says it this way..." The earlier incident (Luke 5:1-11) is important background for interpreting and applying the present passage, for it makes clear that in the minds of Jesus and his disciples, fishing was a symbol for their mission. With Jesus now raised from the dead and his ascension impending, the hour of that mission is at hand. This incident therefore becomes a parable of their impending work, and ours."

Another important difference in the two accounts can be observed about the fishing nets. In Luke's account their nets were breaking and the boat begins to sink. But in John, verse 11 says, *"And although there were so many, the net was not torn"*. Jesus is reminding them that they can do nothing apart from him. Remember Linda Ruth's teaching on John 15? *"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that*

bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." Not only does Jesus reassure them of their new identity and of his presence with them, Jesus reassures them that he will give them his power to accomplish the work he has called them to do. Very soon that power will come by the arrival of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in Acts, Chapter 2.

Much ado was made in the commentaries about the specific number of fish caught that morning - 153. There was a lot of speculation from the OT and 1st century writers. Apart from the practical fact that the disciples would have to divide the catch between them, some said that it was the number of known species of fish at the time. But suffice it to say that the catch is representative of the mission to all nations. DA Carson concludes, "There may be symbolism in the sheer quantity, if not the number itself, since John draws attention to it; but even with so many the net was not torn. This may suggest that the gospel net will never break, that there is no limit to the number of converts it catches."

Jesus reassures the disciples of their new identity; he gives them his presence and promises his power. Because of John's eyewitness account written here, we have the same assurance as the disciples.

Jesus Refreshes the Disciples

I'm not going to lie. This next verse is probably one of my most new favorite verses in all of Scripture. Verse 12, *"Jesus said, Come and have breakfast."* I love breakfast! It is my favorite meal of the day. The reason I love someone to make breakfast for me is because I don't like to make it for myself. Not to mention that this is beachfront!

We know culturally, in first century Israel, sharing a meal symbolized a level of relationship that maybe we can't relate to as much today. The fact that Jesus cooked them breakfast was a significant sign of friendship, intimacy, love and care. In 1 Kings 19, the prophet Elijah had a confrontation with king Ahab and his wife Jezebel and their god Baal. Elijah's life was in danger. He became afraid and ran into the desert and prayed that he might die. What does God do? Does he chastise him for being fearful and running away? No. He sends an angel to refresh Elijah by cooking him a meal, not once but twice. That angel was Jesus Christ.

The disciples were out fishing all night! My guess is that they were exhausted and hungry! In the midst of the lessons Jesus is teaching the disciples, he first takes care of their physical needs. Jesus cares about where you are right now. He cares about your needs. He sees you. He meets you right where you are. This invitation to breakfast is also a call to continued intimacy with Jesus. It is a symbol of his posture toward us. He wants us to know him. Amidst our busy days, he wants us to sit with him, talk with him, cry with him

and know him more fully. Jesus wants us to fully understand his great love for us as represented in his death on the cross on our behalf. 1 John 2:2, NLT, *“He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins.”*

In 1 John 2:2b states *“and not only our sins but the sins of the world.”* The purpose of this breakfast on the beach is to prepare them to take his message of sacrifice to the world around them. Like God caring for Elijah in the dessert, Jesus is caring for his disciples here on the beach.

Jesus Restores Peter

They finish breakfast and Jesus turns his attention to Peter. Our final “loose end or last piece of the puzzle” involves the restoration of Peter. From what does Peter need to be restored? You know the back story. In Matthew 26:31-34, after the last supper, Jesus states, *“Tonight all of you will desert me but after I have been raised from the dead, I will go ahead of you to Galilee and meet you there. Peter declared, ‘even if everyone else deserts you, I will never desert you’.* To which Jesus replied, *I tell you the truth Peter-this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you even know me.”*

Fast forward just a few hours later, Peter publicly denies Jesus three times. As Donna McLaughlin reminded us a few weeks ago, Peter’s fearful and dishonest testimony is in stark contrast to Jesus’ faithful love for us as he died on the cross. 1 John 4:18, *“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.”*

Why do you think that Jesus singles out Peter? Except for John, who we know was present with the women when Jesus was on the cross, the gospel states that they all deserted Jesus. The commentaries pointed out that Peter wasn’t just one of the twelve. Peter was part of the inner circle of Peter, James and John. And Peter was the only one who claimed that he would not deny Jesus. Not only did he claim he wouldn’t deny Jesus, but then he denied him 3 times!! Jesus needs to confront Peter on this in order to restore him.

Tim Keller put it this way. He says, “In Biblical Christianity you do not have a God who says sin is no big deal. If you have a God that doesn’t care about sin, you have a God that is actually not loving.” Jesus goes to great lengths to restore Peter. His three questions about Peter’s devotion parallel Peter’s three denials. The commentaries I read agree that although John uses two different Greek words for love, *agapao* and *phileo*, John often uses them interchangeably. So, carefully and lovingly Jesus proceeds to ask Peter essentially the same question three times, “Do you love me?” J C Ryle says, “We may know much, and do much, and profess much, and make much show in our religion, and

yet be dead before God from lack of love. There is no life where there is no love.” Notice that because of the public nature of his denial, Peter’s reinstatement is carried out publicly in front of the whole group of disciples. *“Do you truly love me more than these?”* referring to the other disciples. DA Carson states, “Whatever potential for future service Peter had, depended not only on forgiveness from Jesus, but also on reinstatement amongst the disciples.”

So those are the three questions. What is Peter’s response? All three times Peter responds with, *“Yes Lord, you know that I love you.”* And the third time, *“Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you.”*

Peter responds with Godly repentance. How do we know that his response is Godly repentance? First, Peter makes no excuses. There is no trace of self-righteousness. Second, Peter doesn’t display signs of guilt or shame, or self-pity, like “I’m just a bad person or unworthy”. Those responses would be the result of worldly sorrow. Thirdly, the text says, Peter was grieved.

In 2 Corinthians, 2:8-10, Paul writes, *“For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it-though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a Godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For Godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.”* There is no doubt that Jesus, like a skilled surgeon, intended to cause this grief in Peter which would lead to repentance. This scene is an example of what it means to repent ‘all the way down’. Repenting all the way down suggests a complete and thorough turning away from sin, involving a deep and sincere change of heart and behavior. It is not superficial, but rather a deep and transformative process. This process of restoration in our own lives is continuous. This principle applies to our saving faith but also to continued faith as we live in the already and not yet. What an encouragement to us! As we daily repent, Jesus restores us too. Tim Keller says, “The greatest leaders in Christianity are the chief repenters.”

For what purpose does Jesus lead Peter to repentance? Peter’s deep repentance allows the forgiveness and grace of Jesus to heal Peter’s heart. Peter is restored so that he can be recommissioned to do the work that God has planned for him.

And what is that work? Jesus gives Peter essentially the same three commands. “Feed my lambs, Tend my sheep, Feed my sheep.” Peter’s work is to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ and to lead the newly established church in faith and practice. We see evidence of Peter fulfilling this work in the book of Acts and the two letters of 1 & 2

Peter. However, these commands are for anyone of us who is a follower of Christ. It is not just for elders or deacons or pastors or those in sister care or small group bible study leaders. These commands are for all of us! To take care of each other and to point one another to the saving grace found in Jesus. I see evidence of this in each one of your lives as you care for one another both spiritually and in physical felt needs. Matthew 20:28, *"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many."* This verse serves as a reflection of the future glimpse given to us in verses 18-19 of what kind of death Peter will endure. Peter would glorify God through the rest of his life and even to his death. Yet Jesus says, "Follow me." And the same goes for us. Following Jesus costs us...our time, our energy, our agenda, our comfort, our finances. Bruce Milne says it this way, "The Christian life is in this sense a continual mortification in which, daily and in a thousand ways, we die to self-will and do the will of the Lord." Just as Peter did, we do this all for the glory of God.

This second half of verse 19 through verses 20-23 along with Jesus words "Follow me", seem to indicate that Jesus invites Peter to walk along removed from the rest of the group. A private conversation ensues between Jesus and Peter. John follows along and apparently overhears the conversation. Unfortunately, we should never underestimate Peter's ability to put his foot in his mouth. After hearing about his own death, Peter begins to ask about John. As if to say, well what about him? Jesus is none too happy about this and basically tells Peter to mind his own business. But how utterly human of Peter's heart to automatically compare himself to his brother.

I can so relate to Peter. Honestly, are we any different? Don't we constantly look to others and compare our lives to theirs? Clearly, Peter and John are completely different people. Hence their ministries look completely different. To quote Bruce Milne, "Peter would be the shepherd, John the seer; Peter the preacher, John the penman; Peter the foundational witness, John the faithful writer; Peter would die in the agony and passion of martyrdom, John would live on to a great age and pass away in quiet serenity." In the end, our focus must remain on our own walk with Jesus. We don't know what our future holds, but we can trust the one who holds it. Each one of us has been given a path to follow. Each one of us has been given circumstances in our lives that we probably would not have chosen for ourselves.

My family has gone through a health scare recently. On February 20th, my 8 year old grandson was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes. T1D is an autoimmune disease whereby the body attacks certain cells in the pancreas which produce insulin for the body. Insulin is necessary for the metabolism of glucose to supply energy to the muscles and organs of the body. If there is no insulin, you slowly starve to death. For the rest of my grandson's

life, he will need injections of insulin to live a healthy life. Being a nurse and as his secondary caregiver, to say I was devastated is an understatement.

As I was preparing for this talk, I realized that there is a spiritual parallel. We all have an autoimmune disease. It is called sin. As diabetes can lead to a physical death when untreated, sin can lead to spiritual death. We don't have what we need to produce godliness in ourselves. Without Christ sacrifice on the cross for our sins and the giving to us of the Holy Spirit we are without power to live for him and do his will. Here, Jesus is preparing them to go out into the world, but he does not leave them alone. He promises them the helper, the Holy Spirit to accomplish his will. In just a few short weeks, at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit is given to the disciples and many others. And Peter, this same Peter here on the beach, gives the speech of his life in Acts 2:14-36. As a result of that speech, verse 41 of Acts 2 states, *"and those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day-about 3,000 in all"*.

This last chapter of John is a powerful reminder of Jesus work to reassure, refresh and restore you. It is a call for you to abide in Christ, live your life by the power of the Holy Spirit, supplied by the Lord as you abide in Him. It is also your call to go out into the world this summer. Tell those in your neighborhood, family, friends about what Jesus has done. You have been given the same forgiveness as Peter. You have been given the same Holy Spirit.

In verse 24, I get the feeling that John notarizes his own signature as he testifies that his words are true. Then he quickly takes the focus off himself and back onto Jesus. Verse 25 states, *"Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written."* Whether this is hyperbole or not, we have been given everything we need to know. And the most important testimony is from Jesus himself in John 14:6, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

Let's pray.