

The Apostle Luke tells us in the Acts of the Apostles that Jesus met frequently with His disciples and followers over the forty-day period between the Resurrection and His ascension back into heaven. Two weeks ago, we discussed Jesus' appearance to seven of the disciples during their fishing trip to the Sea of Galilee. This morning, let's take another look at His post-resurrection appearance to the disciples and Peter by the Sea of Galilee from the 21st chapter of the Gospel of John. I will be reading the text we discussed two weeks ago from the first fourteen verses and then the rest of the story found in verses 15-19 of the 21st chapter of John.

Read John 21:1-19

As we discussed two weeks ago, following the Resurrection, the disciples were still trying to figure out what to do next. They were having a hard time grasping this concept of the Resurrection. They were still confused even after Jesus had breathed the Holy Spirit on them. Well, like many men, when faced with a major decision, what do you do? You go fishing! Thus, Peter goes back to his previous profession. When you are overwhelmed by the demands and problems of life, hanging up a sign on the door saying "Gone Fishing" is not a bad idea. And believe me, as I have indicated before, I have done this several times. I don't know about you, but I have solved a lot of problems sitting in a jonboat on a quiet lake.

As you listened to the story, you get the impression that the writer, the Apostle John, knew something about fishing on the Sea of Galilee. Nighttime was the best for fishing on the Sea of Galilee. With blazing torches, the boat glides over the water as the men search for pools of fish; when they spot their prey, they fling their nets in hope of catching them.

Now I have never been fishing at night, but when I was growing up in South Carolina, we often went frog gigging at night. We would get into the aluminum jonboat that we kept on our farm pond and slowly move along the shore, shining a flashlight onto the bank. The frogs would be captivated by the light in their eyes and stay still until we giggered them with a metal pole.

Now the only problem was that snakes were also attracted to the light and the boat occasionally had to go under tree limbs; so, you had to be on the lookout for snakes dropping into the boat. Also, fish occasionally would jump into the boat, and one night a bluegill jumped in and was flopping around and making all kinds of noise; and one of the boys with us jumped out into the middle of the pond, and tried to follow Jesus' example of walking on water. Growing up, we had a lot of good times on that pond! Judy has often remarked that it is a wonder that my bothers and I have lived this long. Do you know what the last words of a redneck are? Hey, y'all, watch this!

Well, like most of my fishing trips, the disciples didn't catch anything that night. It was near daybreak and they were heading back to the shore. They were about one hundred yards off shore when they heard a voice calling from the shore asking if they had caught anything. When they indicated that they didn't have any luck, Jesus told them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. When they did, the nets were so full that they nearly broke. At this point, John recognized that it was Jesus on the shore and Peter jumped into the lake and swam to Him.

When the other disciples reached the shore, Jesus invited them to breakfast. Almost as amazing as the Resurrection is, so is this picture of Jesus, the Messiah and the Son of God, recently crucified and newly raised from the dead, cooking and serving breakfast. He feeds and nurtures His disciples. As He washed their feet on the night of the Lord's Supper, here Jesus gives us another example of service for all of us to follow.

Now you have to wonder what Peter must have been thinking as he ate breakfast with the Resurrected Lord. As they gathered around the fire of coals to warm up and partake of the meal that the Lord had prepared, it must have reminded Peter of sitting around the fire in the courtyard of the High Priest where he warmed himself and denied three times that he was one of Jesus' disciples. Now Peter had seen the Lord at least twice since the Resurrection and Jesus had not mentioned the denials yet. Have you ever been in a situation where you are waiting for the other person to bring up that sore point between the two of you? If so, you know how Peter felt.

Finally, Jesus takes Peter aside for a private discussion. Now Peter must have been thinking "here it comes." One of the things that you have to like about Peter is that even though he makes mistakes, some big ones, he keeps on trying to get it right. In this passage, Jesus is giving him a second chance.

Three times Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him. Peter quickly assures Jesus that, of course, he loves Him. How could Jesus doubt it? Our text tells us that Peter's feelings were hurt when Jesus asked him a third time if he loved Him. Had Peter already forgotten how he denied knowing Jesus three times? Did he forget that when he denied Jesus the third time, Jesus looked him straight in the eye? Did he forget how that felt and how he wept like a child. In asking the question three times, was Jesus somehow trying to cancel the three denials and restore Peter to his status as the rock of the church?

After each of Peter's positive replies, Jesus says: "Feed my lambs, tend my sheep, and feed my sheep." In other words, Jesus tells Peter that if you really love me, Peter, show it this time. Show it in what you do, where you go, how you act, and how you live your life. If you love me, act like it. Follow me. Feed others, both physically and spiritually, as I have fed you. Serve

others as I have served you. If you want to know which people to love and serve, remember the people that I loved and served. If you wonder how people should be treated, remember how I treated others. If you love me, feed and care for the people that I love; the people that I came to serve and save.

I have always liked Peter. He is one of the most interesting characters in the Bible, especially in the New Testament. He was hard-headed like me and maybe some of you. When Jesus was washing the feet of the disciples at the Lord's Supper and came to Peter, Peter initially refused to let Jesus wash his feet. Peter could also be bossy or wanting his way at times. For example, when Jesus informed the disciples in Matthew 16:23 that He must suffer, be crucified, and rise from the grave in three days, Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked Him; this was not how Peter wanted things to turn out. Then Jesus made that famous statement: "Get thee behind me, Satan." Jesus was not calling Peter the devil, but indicating that Peter was thinking more like the devil, being selfish, and not seeking God's will.

Peter also had to battle his pride. Looking again at the Lord's Supper, when Jesus tells the disciples that they will all desert Him, Peter boldly boasts that even though the other disciples may desert Jesus in His hour of need, he never will; he had Jesus' back. Jesus then predicts that Peter will deny knowing Him not once but three times before the night is over. All of the disciples deserted Jesus that night, but Peter ran the farthest.

Now Peter may have been a little hard-headed and prideful, but he was also insightful. In one of the readings for our Wednesday Night Bible Study, Jesus asks His disciples who do the people say I am. They reply that some say that He is John the Baptist, other Elijah, and still others one of the prophets. But Jesus presses them by asking but who do you say I am. Peter boldly proclaims that He is the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus tells Peter that he is correct and goes on to say: "I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven."

This is most likely where we get the idea that Peter is in charge of the gates of heaven. I heard a story about a woman who was killed in a car accident. When she gets to the Pearly Gates, Peter tells her that she must spell one word before she can enter. She says okay, and Peter asks her to spell "LOVE." She correctly spells it and enters heaven. Two years later Peter is called away for an hour and asks her to watch the gate for him. During this time, her former husband appears at the gate. She says that she has missed him and asks him how he has been. He says that things were going great until he had this heart attack. He had married her best friend and they had spent two wonderful years traveling around the world on the money from her insurance policy. Then he asks if he can come in now. She tells him that first he must correctly spell one word. He says okay and she replies: "Czechoslovakia."

Peter was one of those impulsive people; you know, the type who speaks first without thinking; in other words, the open mouth insert foot personality. For example, when Jesus walked out on the water to the disciples' boat on the Sea of Galilee, Peter immediately asked Jesus to call him and let him also walk on the water. Then Peter started walking across the Sea of Galilee, but when he took his eyes off Jesus, he began to sink. I love the passage from Matthew 14:30-31 where it states: "But when Peter saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Immediately Jesus reached out His hand and caught him."

Jesus reached out His hand and pulled Peter up from the water. What a beautiful sight! And as you read the gospel accounts, you will see Jesus picking Peter up again and again when he stumbles and makes mistakes until he becomes the servant that Jesus needed. Jesus kept working with Peter, building up his faith. Jesus was preparing Peter for the role that He had planned for him.

Jesus saw great potential in this head-strong fisherman from Galilee. But He had to teach Peter what it meant to be a real servant of the Almighty. And over the three years that they were together, Jesus taught him by example. In Matthew 20:25-28, Jesus told His disciples and us today: "You've observed how godless rulers throw their weight around, how quickly a little power goes to their heads. It's not going to be that way with you. Whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. That is what the Son of Man has done. He came to serve, not to be served." Jesus preached, taught and lived the life of servant leadership. And believe me, just as servant leadership was lacking in Jesus' times, it is definitely lacking today, not only in politics, business, and government, but also in the church.

In restoring Peter to the leadership role that he was called to play, Jesus had only one qualifying question: "Do you truly love me?" To lead like Jesus and to be the servant leader that He desires requires that we learn to love like Jesus. We need to see people as Jesus saw them; as He saw Peter and the other disciples, people with hope and potential. We need to look for the best in all people. We need to take off our blinders, prejudices, and judgmental attitudes, and be sensitive to the needs of people around us.

When Peter made his boastful statement at supper that he would always have Jesus' back, Jesus knew that Peter did not yet understand what truly loving Him meant. So Jesus tells Peter that he will deny knowing Jesus three times that night. Now a few days later on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus restores Peter with the question: "Do you truly love me?" Jesus is telling Peter and each of us this morning, don't just talk about loving me, show it in your actions and how you live your life; do something about it; show your love through acts of kindness to others. Talk is cheap, but actions are priceless.

In closing, Jesus is asking each one of us this morning: "Do you truly love me?" If so, feed my lambs, tend to my sheep. Is our love for Jesus just talk, or do we back it up with action? What ministries are you involved in? Where is God calling you to serve? Is it feeding the hungry through the Pantry, providing weekend food packages to local students, feeding the homeless through Pastor Joanne's work in the International Zone, supporting Pastor Chris' work with the people of Gallup and the Navajo Nation, providing assistance to St. Joseph Mission School, visiting the sick and shut-in, teaching classes, providing support for Haven House, and many other ways?

Like Peter, Jesus has a task for each one of us. Beware of counterfeiting your love for Jesus by following your own personal agenda and not His. We answer Jesus' question: "Do you truly love me" when we willingly serve and follow Him. May we each answer as Peter did: "Yea, Lord, you know that I love you!" And then let's back it up by living our daily lives in service to Him. Let's feed His lambs! Amen