

John 21:1-19

¹ After [he appeared to his followers in Jerusalem,] Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. ² Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. ³ 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.

⁴ Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." ⁶ He said to them, "Cast the net to 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 there were so many fish. ⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. ⁸ But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

⁹ When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." ¹¹ So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. ¹⁸ Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." ¹⁹ (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

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After Jesus was crucified, and he returned to the disciples to let them know he was risen, he didn't stay with them. They must have felt as though they were without a leader, and didn't really know what to do. Being tired of doing nothing, they decided to go back to what they knew best before Jesus led them over the countryside. They went fishing. Unfortunately, their return to their prior occupation proved fruitless; no fish were caught. You see, once Jesus catches you, you can't be successful in going back to the way you were before. That is, unless he empowers you.

Jesus called out to the men, who had spent the night on the lake fishing for nothing. Throw the net over the right side of the boat. These disciples, Peter, Thomas,

Nathanael, James, John and 2 unnamed disciples, without question, not knowing who it was telling them to go to the right side of the boat, threw their nets out again. And their nets filled with fish. Not just a few fish, but 153 large fish, too many to pull into the boat. That's when John realized it was Jesus, and Peter put on his outer garments and went to be with Jesus, leaving the other 6 to deal with a boatload of fish. Do you know someone like Peter, someone who would rather be with their friend than help to do the heavy work?

In a book entitled simply, *Saint Peter*, historian Michael Grant devotes an entire chapter to Peter's weaknesses. Throughout the gospel narratives Peter shows an incredible lack of comprehension as to who Jesus was and what he was all about. And while none of the disciples come across as exemplary faith models, Grant argues that Peter is portrayed in a particularly unfavorable light.

Peter is censured by Paul as having misunderstood who Jesus was and what he was trying to accomplish. In moments of confusion and fear, Peter speaks without really understanding what he's saying. Peter's attempt to walk on water failed because he had insufficient faith. When Jesus was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter, like the others, fell asleep. And when Jesus returns and finds them sleeping, Jesus seems to single out Peter, "Couldn't you stay awake even for an hour?" Almost like Jesus somehow expected more from him. At the dinner table Jesus told Peter he would deny him three times, around a charcoal fire Peter denied Jesus three times, and as Jesus looked him in the eye, Peter realized what he had done and was filled with sorrow.

Do you suppose that despite his flaws, Jesus was looking for someone just like Peter—is looking for people who listen to their hearts? Who aren't afraid of their own emotions? Who are passionate about the things he was passionate about? People who are downright uninhibited and unafraid? Because if left merely to the rationale of our human ways of thinking and being, we'd always look for an out. We seem to be most comfortable when we are in control, when we're organizing and ordering, qualifying and categorizing, being efficient and expedient. But there is a huge difference between showing emotion and being emotional.

Peter wasn't just leaving his friends behind to do all the work, he was showing emotion, he was excited that Jesus was on the shore, he wanted to see the man whom he had spent 3 years of his life following, the one whom he had denied 3 times.

Jesus had the fish grilling, the bread was there waiting for the disciples to eat, yet he told Peter to go get more fish. And Peter obeyed. Jesus gives us sustenance, but he expects us to do our part in obtaining what we need. It's strange that this is the time that John writes in his gospel that 153 fish were caught and the net hadn't broken. We could get caught up in the number 153. A lot of people have, there are quite a few well thought out reasons that the specific number was given, but what is obvious is that there were a lot of large fish in the net and it wasn't torn at all. Usually the fishermen had to spend time repairing their nets before they could go fishing again. But Jesus had provided a large catch with no repair work needed. It truly was a miracle.

While the disciples were eating breakfast Jesus asked Peter 3 times, "Do you love me?" Three times for the three times Peter had denied Jesus. Three times for Peter to say "Yes, I love you." Three times for Jesus to give Peter a mission, a mission to start fishing for people instead of fish. Feed my lambs... bring people into the fold. Tend my sheep... teach them the way of the risen Jesus. Feed my sheep... continue to grow the

fold in the wisdom of the way. That's what a shepherd does, takes care of the sheep. Jesus was the Good Shepherd, and he was telling Peter it was time for him to be a good shepherd now. It was time for him to stop fishing for fish and start fishing for people. It was time for him to turn away from what had been his livelihood before Jesus and time for him to fish for people, to bring people to Jesus.

Jesus expects that of us as well. Once we know Jesus, really know Jesus, we change the way we've always done things. We find a pathway that Jesus wants us to pursue. Jesus told Peter to "Follow me." And he says that to us, "Follow me. Change what you're doing that harms people. Change what you're doing that isn't productive. Change what you're doing that keeps not only you, but anyone whom you may encounter, from growing into a closer relationship with God." Offer people a new way of viewing the world. Give them the hope that Jesus, God, is always near, that they aren't living this life just to be alive, but to treat others in a way they know there is hope, that they know people are civil and even kind.

In his book *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff, and it's all Small Stuff*, Richard Carlson writes "I have learned that the best way to be of service is often very simple - it's those little, quiet, often unnoticed acts of kindness that I can choose on a daily basis - being supportive of a new endeavor by my spouse, or simply taking the time and energy to listen. I know that I have a long way to go toward my goal of becoming a more selfless person. However, I also know that as I have attempted to integrate service into my life, I have felt better and better about the way I choose to live. There is an ancient saying: 'Giving is its own reward.' It's really true. When you give, you also receive. In fact, what you receive is directly proportional to what you give. As you give more freely of yourself in your own unique ways, you will experience more feelings of peace than you ever thought possible. Everyone wins, especially you" (Richard Carlson, Ph.D., "Make Service an Integral Part of Your Life," *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff ... and It's All Small Stuff*. New York: Hyperion, 1997, 178-179).

So, we have a decision to make. Will we allow ourselves to change and grow and follow where Jesus leads? Will we reach out to others so they can know the love of God? Will we at least be kind, listening with our full attention, becoming more supportive of the people we love, maybe even going as far as to become selfless, or in other words humble so that we see other's needs as important? At the end of this gospel reading all Jesus said was, "Follow me." What does that mean to you? Are you willing to go where you haven't been for the sake of building the kingdom of God? All glory be to God.