

**John 21 [NIV]**

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: <sup>2</sup> Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. <sup>3</sup> "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.

<sup>4</sup> Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

<sup>5</sup> He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. [c] <sup>9</sup> When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

<sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup> Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. <sup>14</sup> This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

<sup>15</sup> 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."

<sup>16</sup> Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

<sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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." <sup>19</sup> Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

<sup>20</sup> 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?") <sup>21</sup> When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?"

<sup>22</sup> Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." <sup>23</sup> 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?"

<sup>24</sup> This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

<sup>25</sup> Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

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John 21 is our text for today, if you'd care to turn there. John, chapter 21.

Waiting.

Most people are not good at waiting. It's very hard for us to do, mostly because it puts us out of control, and we all love control. That's what caused, and is one of the curses of, the fall: the need for control.

And it makes waiting a very hard thing for us to do, at any age, really.

When you're young, 15 minutes can seem like forever.

"When will class be over so I can go play?"

"When will that girl I like text me back?"

And it doesn't really get any easier as you age. The situations just seem to get bigger:

When will my 16<sup>th</sup> birthday come, so I can drive?

It's taking forever to finish school!

How long until I find that special person?

How long until I get promoted?

When are you going to provide me with grandchildren!?

How many more years until retirement?

When can I expect the results of that medical test?

Time changes as you age, and our perspective of what's important can change, but the agony of waiting seems to stay largely the same.

Some of Jesus' disciples illustrate that for us here.

You notice that, at this point, at least they're no longer hiding in the locked room. They've all seen Jesus. Acts 1 tells us He appeared to them several times over the course of 40 days. John, right there in verse 14, says this was the third of those times.

They've all seen Him, and they had all heard Him say, "Look! I really am alive. You're not crazy. You're not seeing things. You don't need to be afraid. I have a job for you to do, but I'm going to send you a helper who will help you understand all this. So, wait for Him."<sup>1</sup>

So – they waited.

But when would this "counselor" come? How long would they have to wait? They didn't know, and that put them out of control, you see, and they didn't like being out of control any more than we do.

How long would *you* sit around and wait?

How long do you suppose someone like *Peter* could sit around and wait? I mean, you know Peter's personality. Kind of like Larry the Cable Guy, Peter was a "get 'er done" kind of fellow. He's the one who jumped into the water to walk to Jesus.

<sup>1</sup> John 14:26

He was the one who pulled the sword to fight the mob.

He was the one to even correct Jesus with the “No way I’m letting them do that to you!” comment as Jesus tried to talk about his death.

Peter was the kind of guy who did not wait well, which is why – at least I think it is why – he said to the others there in verse 3, “*I’m going fishing.*”

Through the years, people have suggested all sorts of reasons why they thought Peter went fishing, but I don’t think for a minute that he was giving up on Jesus, or choosing to go back to some old life, or anything like that.

I just don’t think it was Peter’s nature to sit and think. Peter wasn’t a ponderer or a navel-gazer. He was a doer, and doers want to *do* something, and fishing was what Peter knew how to do.

Now, of course, Peter was also dealing with a lot of internal turmoil and pressure.

In his mind, he had failed Jesus, and that was a hard thing to live with.

And this failure haunted him. You see, when you fail someone and they go away, that’s one thing.

But when you fail someone and they show up again at your door – or in Jesus’ case, they show up *through* your door, that’s something different, isn’t it? Your failure doesn’t just fade away – you’re reminded of it over and over again, because every time you see the person, you think, “What are they thinking about me? How do I resolve this? Can we ever have relationship again? What would that look like?”

All those issues of guilt and shame – they’re just right there in your face, and that’s especially difficult when you’re just sitting and waiting.

So, I’m thinking that’s another reason Peter decided to go fishing: it got Peter outside and into a comfortable and familiar environment.

It kept his hands busy and his mind occupied.

Honestly, it put him back into control of things – to some degree, or so he thought, anyway.

I’d imagine Peter was really torn about his situation.

On one hand, he probably very much wanted to see Jesus, because, well, that’s just who Jesus is: Jesus is winsome and attractive. He can’t help drawing people to Himself.

Which, then, should cause the Church to ask herself, “If we’re the body of Christ, but people aren’t drawn to Jesus through us, then what’s wrong with us? What is it about our presentation of Jesus that needs to be corrected?”

Of course, Peter wanted to see Jesus.

But at the same time, I’d imagine Peter also sort of hoped that Jesus wouldn’t show up because of all the stuff of the past – because of his own failures and shame.

But then, of course, Jesus shows up.

He has a way of doing that, doesn’t He – showing up at those sorts of times?

That’s one thing about Jesus: He won’t let us hide from our troubles and doubts and internal battles. *We* might try to just bury them and put them out of our minds, but *He* won’t let that happen, at least not for very

long. Jesus is just remarkably good at digging up and exposing that sort of stuff in our lives.

*But*, unlike *some* people who do that, Jesus doesn’t dig around in us just to cause us pain or to make Him feel important. Jesus’ intention in exposing bad stuff in us is always to heal us, which is where trust in Him really matters, you see, because sometimes the way Jesus heals is tough and confrontational and painful.

So painful is Jesus’ healing process, sometimes we think it just might kill us.

Like right here with Peter.

Jesus shows up there, in the middle of Peter’s fishing trip, and He does so in very familiar fashion. Did you notice that?

For Peter, this had to be, as Coach Yogi Berra supposedly said, “*déjà vu* all over again.”

It’s no accident that Jesus asks, “Hey, how goes the fishing?”

And when the guys in the boat say, “Not very good,” it’s no coincidence that Jesus then suggests, “Why don’t you throw your nets on the other side of the boat? Why don’t you try again?”

You see, all this had happened before between Peter and Jesus. Luke tells us about it in his gospel, chapter 5.

That’s why it was familiar. Jesus meant for it to be.

It was still too early in the morning – too dark and misty there by the lake – to really see who it was that was talking to them from the shore. So maybe it was Jesus’ language – maybe His tone, His words or the way He put phrases together. It’s hard to really know what tipped them off.

Maybe it was when, after they did what He said to do, the fish just started jumping into their net – maybe *that’s* when John knew that it had to be Jesus.

And he couldn’t keep it to Himself. Excitedly, he said to the others in the boat, “It’s the Lord!”

And once again, in another instance of *déjà vu*, Peter jumps out of the boat and into the water in order to get to Jesus.

It was all so familiar, you see? It was supposed to be.

And yet at the same time, there was a tension present here, and especially so with Peter. Verse 12 says that none of the disciples dared to ask Him who He was.

They knew the “who,” you see?

What they didn’t know was the “what.” They didn’t know *what* to do, *what* to expect, *what* Jesus thought of them – fishing. They didn’t know *what* Jesus was going to say. They didn’t know *what* Jesus wanted in His visit.

So, there was tension, and of course, Jesus knew that if it was to be dispelled, He was going to have to address it.

So, He begins with Peter – the leader, and the most conflicted. Beginning in verse 15, Jesus asks three times, “Peter, do you love me?”

Now, just as with other parts of this account, much has been made of this interchange between Jesus and Peter through the years. The phrases have been dissected. The words for “love” have been analyzed.

About what, precisely, Jesus was trying to do here, everyone has an opinion.

But here's the correct one: no, I'm kidding.

Here's what it seems to me that Jesus is doing: simply put, He's making Peter whole. He's restoring Peter to wholeness, and I think that because I know that's just what Jesus does with people.

If you will walk with Jesus, He will make you whole, and He will do whatever it takes to get that accomplished.

In Peter's case, Jesus had to walk Peter back to earlier days, to earlier times.

To times that speak of Peter's commitment and courage and faith.

And then also, to those times of Peter's frustration and doubt and desertion, you see?

That's why Jesus not only recalled here Peter's three denials, but also the whole fishing experience: the miraculously overwhelming catch, the jumping out of the boat.

Jesus is reminding Peter of who Peter was, who Peter had become through Jesus, and who Peter could be again.

It's more than just forgiveness that Jesus is after.

Jesus' healings dig deep. He takes us to places we don't often want to go—places we would not go, if the choice were ours, but places we need to go in order to be whole.

If we'll follow Him there, He'll make us whole people.

You see, Jesus didn't just restore their relationship. Jesus also restored Peter's confidence in his commitment to Jesus, and also Peter's sense of purpose and mission.

"Here we are, together again, Peter. Of course, you can approach me. Of course, you love me. And, of course, you have eternally significant work to do."

Jesus did all this for Peter, but there was more. Jesus also addresses Peter's need for control, you see, there in verse 18.

"Here's the deal Peter - you're not in control of yourself if you're going to follow me. Maturity in Christ means giving up the demand for controlling your own life and allowing me to lead you."

That's what it means to follow Jesus—to give up what we want and adopt what He wants.

"So, Peter, are you going to do that?"

And then, Jesus goes even further with Peter there in verse 22.

When Peter expressed concern about someone else's relationship with Jesus—presumably John's, Jesus reminds Peter, "Don't worry about my relationship with other disciples. Don't compare yourself to others. Don't judge your importance or success by the standard of others. Don't judge the performance of others. You just worry about you and me—about you *with* me. You concern yourself with you listening to me, you obeying me, you following me. If you'll do that, then all will be well in the end."

Jesus was getting at every part of Peter's character that had the potential to tug him away from Jesus.

You see, that's—that's complete restoration.

Jesus doesn't just forgive Peter here. What's going on is far more than just forgiveness.

Jesus is healing Peter's *past* - his failures;

his *purpose* - what he's going to do with his life;

his *possessiveness* - his need for control;

and his *perspective* - how he views others.

Jesus is dealing with Peter comprehensively here: wholeness for his life. He did all that for Peter there at the shore.

And Jesus would like to do the same for all of us here today.

He's calling out right now, asking those of us who've chosen to do our own thing, "So, how's life going for you—are catching any fish?"

If you struggle with being forgiven for issues from your *past*, as Peter did, Jesus wants to address that with you today and restore you to relationship with Him.

If you question your *purpose*, or maybe don't feel worthy of the purpose that you know He has for you, Jesus wants to go there with you. As He did with Peter, He'll assure you that you have a place in His Kingdom. One way or another, Jesus has sheep for you to feed.

If you struggle with *possessiveness* and the demand for control, Jesus will remind you, as He reminded Peter, that you really aren't able to do that well, and that you need to give it up and let Him take charge of your life.

Frankly, by definition, that's what it means to *follow* Him—to let Him have the reins.

And, if you struggle with *perspective*—of wanting to know about Jesus' plans for others, He'll address that just as He did with Peter by pointing you back to you—you and Him, because ultimately, that's the only business that is ours.

Jesus wants to do more than forgive us. He wants to make us whole, as He did on the shore there with Peter.

Would you invite Him to do that—maybe a part of that or maybe all of that—for you, in you, today?

Just as He called to Peter, He's calling out to us, "Come and be forgiven, come and be healed, come and be whole."

Prayer

Closing Song: *He Touched Me*

Benediction:

The Lord said to Jeremiah, "I will restore you to health and heal your wounds..." [Jeremiah 30:17]

And so, Jeremiah said to the Lord, "Heal me, Lord, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved, for you are the one I praise." [Jeremiah 17:14]

Let us trust the Lord and follow Him—not just to forgiveness, but all the way to wholeness.