

John 21:1-19

¹⁻³ After this, Jesus appeared again to the disciples, this time at the Tiberias Sea (the Sea of Galilee). This is how he did it: Simon Peter, Thomas (nicknamed “Twin”), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the brothers Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. Simon Peter announced, “I’m going fishing.”

³⁻⁴ The rest of them replied, “We’re going with you.” They went out and got in the boat. They caught nothing that night. When the sun came up, Jesus was standing on the beach, but they didn’t recognize him.

⁵ Jesus spoke to them: “Good morning! Did you catch anything for breakfast?”

They answered, “No.”

⁶ He said, “Throw the net off the right side of the boat and see what happens.”

They did what he said. All of a sudden there were so many fish in it, they weren’t strong enough to pull it in.

⁷⁻⁹ Then the disciple Jesus loved said to Peter, “It’s the Master!”

When Simon Peter realized that it was the Master, he threw on some clothes, for he was stripped for work, and dove into the sea. The other disciples came in by boat for they weren’t far from land, a hundred yards or so, pulling along the net full of fish. When they got out of the boat, they saw a fire laid, with fish and bread cooking on it.

¹⁰⁻¹¹ Jesus said, “Bring some of the fish you’ve just caught.” Simon Peter joined them and pulled the net to shore—153 big fish! And even with all those fish, the net didn’t rip.

¹² Jesus said, “Breakfast is ready.” Not one of the disciples dared ask, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Master.

¹³⁻¹⁴ Jesus then took the bread and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus had shown himself alive to the disciples since being raised from the dead.

¹⁵ After breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?”

“Yes, Master, you know I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

¹⁶ He then asked a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”

“Yes, Master, you know I love you.”

Jesus said, “Shepherd my sheep.”

¹⁷⁻¹⁹ Then he said it a third time: “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was upset that he asked for the third time, “Do you love me?” so he answered, “Master, you know everything there is to know. You’ve got to know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. I’m telling you the very truth now: When you were young you dressed yourself and went wherever you wished, but when you get old you’ll have to stretch out your hands while someone else dresses you and takes you where you don’t want to go.” He said this to hint at the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. And then he commanded, “Follow me.”

Jesus Lives as Our Lord

...Or does he? I tell you, every time I address Jesus as “Lord” in prayer or in song I feel a bit ashamed, because “Lord” is an awfully big word. Lord means master, the one who is obeyed. In

the Old Testament it means God, Yahweh. But I'd be kidding myself to think that Jesus is really my Lord. Sure, I have committed my life to serving the Church, but I find it convenient that Jesus is not visible to me all the time. I don't hear him with my ears, so it's easy to NOT listen to him when I choose not to, which just goes to prove that too often Jesus is NOT my Lord; I am my Lord. Once it was easy for me to criticize those faithless disciples for abandoning Jesus, Peter for denying that he even knew Jesus, but if I'm honest with myself, I don't have the right to criticize. Those guys gave up everything to follow Jesus, and by everything I mean EVERYthing – job and home and likely a lot of friends. I receive a salary and I've got a nice home just up the street. I hardly have to spend any time apart from my wife if I so choose. I may claim to be a disciple, but what has discipleship really cost me? I dare say that I am too comfortable with the kind of life that most people live – a full-time job that still affords me days off, evenings free, and paid vacations. I am very well-fed and have a comfortable home and a reliable car. If the criterion for being a disciple is spreading the good news of the Kingdom of God and working to bring it about, I'm a part-time disciple at best. If the criterion for being a disciple is making Jesus Lord of my life, I still have a long way to go.

This worship series is for my own good as well as for yours, and I started this series by having you imagine a perfect world according to *God's* plan; it's a world where there is perfect peace because there is perfect justice because there is perfect love among all people. A perfect world according to *our* standards would just be a place where everyone does exactly what we want them to do – you may recall that the first sin committed in the Garden of Eden was the result of humanity's desire to *be just like God*, only we imagined God as one we serve and we like the idea of being served. But a world where everyone just does what you want them to do is a world without love, because love involves giving, love involves serving, and love involves choice, and if our hearts are set on taking and subjecting people to our personal service there can be no love. Consequently our little paradise based upon our own desires is more like hell than heaven. It's a place where everyone serves us without loving us, and so it becomes a place where we grow bitter and lonely. This is what Jesus saves us from. His victory over the forces that thought they could squash him like a bug because *he* got in the way of *their* kingdom and their power and their glory – his victory over those powers of self-aggrandizement saves us from being enslaved to the same failed system. Christ has saved us from ourselves. Alleluia!

Last week I said that Jesus lives not only as our Savior but also as our Healer. Sin is so entrenched in us and in the world that we can be blind to it, but we have the assurance of God's forgiveness (which frees us from the fear of God's wrath) and we have the power of the Holy Spirit helping us find the sin that we as individuals and as a society don't see very easily. We have to repent – in other words, we have to earnestly desire to *see* our own sins and to be rid of them. And the degree to which we are *healed* of our sins is the degree to which we will make Christ our Lord.

Today I want you to see the importance of knowing that Jesus *lives* as your Lord, because unless you experience Jesus as the Resurrected Lord you can easily become lethargic, lazy, and indifferent to needs of the world around you. Remember that Christ is Lord of all Creation and he has commissioned us to “bring forth the kingdom” in our midst. We have a tragic situation occurring in our Gospel reading today. The disciples have met the Risen Christ in Jerusalem in the upper room, and they rejoiced over this. But now we find them back in Galilee, and I imagine

that they are down in the dumps. Why? Well, true enough they *saw* Jesus after the Resurrection, but Jesus was not just settling in with them. He was seen, and then he was gone. He gave them instructions, then he disappeared. This may indeed be OUR experience with Jesus; we may have had some special moment or moments when we felt Christ's presence, but it wasn't permanent, and after awhile the thrill of that moment wears off. Not only that, but your story may not be something you feel comfortable sharing with everyone. Maybe you can share it with other Christians, telling them how you felt so close to Jesus, how you sensed his presence, how you heard him speak to you, and they may be thrilled and encouraged to hear your testimony, but to a non-believing world your story may just persuade others that your potato's been baking too long, that you've got a loose screw. And so your Christian witness is stifled because people just don't believe it. I think that's how Peter and those other disciples felt. *They* knew that they had seen Jesus; the problem was that no one else had, and they sounded like lunatics telling others what they had witnessed.

Not only that, but they probably looked kind of foolish to a lot of the locals. Peter and the other disciples had left Galilee and their fishing business to go off on this adventure with this ex-carpenter turned preacher, and they had come to believe that he was the messiah. Now, as far as anyone in Galilee could tell, Jesus was dead, another victim of those who rule with iron fists. To the average, cynical resident of Galilee this was to be expected, and to them people like Peter and Thomas and John and Nathaniel looked like naïve, starry-eyed groupies whose expectations were unrealistic. Their master was bound to get squashed, and Peter and the others were fools for not seeing that.

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And I think this is where Peter and the others were mentally when we begin today's reading. I think they had resigned themselves to go back to their old profession, and they were probably relieved to get away from all the sniggering and *I-told-you-sos* that they were hearing from their neighbors. And imagine for a minute what the fate of the church would be if they had reverted to being fishermen once again. The news of the Resurrection would never go anywhere. The disciples would have started to doubt their own experience, perhaps thinking that they had hallucinated the whole resurrection. Jesus would forever be forgotten. His teachings would never have been recorded. Perhaps people would have just resigned themselves to the idea that might makes right, that there is no use in standing up to those in power because you'll only get crushed for doing so. I believe the world would be a very dark place today if that was how the story ended.

But Peter and the others were reminded that day that Jesus was indeed *alive!* It may have been weeks or months since they saw him in Jerusalem, and in that time they had lost their zeal. But just when things were about to go completely wrong, Jesus appears on the shore, and though they weren't sure who it was at first, they eventually recognize that yes, this is Jesus!

And it's after this breakfast that Jesus, in a very gentle way, reminds Peter that the adventure he embarked on three years ago is not over but rather is just beginning.

"Peter, do you love me more than fishing, more than a predictable, safe, sheltered life here in Galilee?"

"Yes Lord. Of course I love you."

"Feed my lambs...shepherd my lambs...feed my sheep."

In other words, the mission is not over. All that Jesus has taught, by word and by example, this is what we need to do with our lives. And the key word here is LOVE.

“If you love me, you will tend to the sheep, you’ll feed the lambs,” and the whole world is Jesus’ lambs. You see, love is what Jesus came to restore to this world. He came to show how God’s kingdom operates with LOVE at its core. Our motivation for serving Christ is so different from what motivates most people to serve someone; the way this world operates, one serves because either one is afraid of what will happen to you if you *don’t* serve OR one is hoping to get some reward, a piece of the action, a position of power or something in return for our service. That’s not how God’s kingdom works. We’ve already received our reward, and God’s love is such that we have nothing to fear. Love motivates us, and love dictates how much we’re willing to give. As John 3:16 says, “for God so loved the world that he gave...” How much are we willing to give for God? For Jesus? If we truly love him, we feed his sheep and we shepherd his flock.

And so as we conclude the series, my prayer is that you and I would let it sink in that Jesus is alive, and though we may not recognize him, if we open our eyes and our hearts we will see him in our day-to-day lives. I pray that it would sink in how Jesus has saved us from death and from despair in this life that comes from the observation of all the wrong that exists around us. I pray that it would sink in how Jesus assures us of our forgiveness for our many shortcomings and how he works in us through the Holy Spirit to heal us and fix what is broken. And I pray that as we appreciate more and more how much Jesus loves us, how much God loves us, that we would truly make him our Lord.