

Natalie W. Bell
May 5, 2019

Do You Love Me?
John 21:1-19

After these things 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,^[a] 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^[b] 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.

Jesus and Peter

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.”

This is an incredible story,
It’s got so much **power and strength for us today!**

It happens after John’s Gospel **seems to end with Chapter 20**.
In that chapter, Mary goes to the empty tomb,
then Jesus appears to the disciples in a locked upper room,
and again when Thomas is with them.

After that the John says: ³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹ But these are written so that you may come to believe^[d] that Jesus is the Messiah,^[e] the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Then **surprise!** We have today’s story in John 21!
It may have been an **after thought**,
But what if it’s like an **encore** at a concert, saving some of the best for last!

Isn’t this some of the best John has to offer us?
The entire story shows us how the risen Jesus meets his followers—
right where they are.
Right after his resurrection, and today.

The **context** of the story is important.
The disciples are **worn out after a week of emotional overload**—
the Passover entrance into Jerusalem,
the Last Supper,
Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion,
and then three days later—an empty tomb,
with Mary preaching the resurrection!
The disciples have seen the risen Jesus in a locked upper room, twice!
Talk about a **roller coaster of emotion**--- love, horror, grief, shock!

What do you do when you are emotionally overloaded?
What helps you when you are grieving? How do we handle it?

For many of us, we just ***put one foot in front of the other***, and keep going. We throw our legs over the edge of the bed, and get up, even if we don't feel like it, don't we?

Doesn't grief often send us to do that which is ***most familiar*** to us? like ***going back to work, or helping people*** around us?

I wonder if that's what's happening here when Peter suggests to these fishermen that they go fishing? After all, it's been ***a crazy week***, maybe they thought they could lose themselves in their work for awhile..... Only, they don't catch a thing all night.

This story opens at ***daybreak*** (*another reminder of the resurrection—which happened while it was still dark, early on Sunday morning*) As the sun is coming up, they ***see a man*** on the shore, suggesting that they throw their nets to the other side of the boat.

And just like Mary Magdalene, they ***don't recognize Jesus*** until their nets are bursting with ***153 fish!*** The number 153 may have significance, but what if the most important thing is that it is so large—so ***ABUNDANT---just like Jesus' grace***, just like God's love for us!

Once they make the big catch, John says "***It is the Lord***", and Peter jumps out of the boat to meet Jesus.

It makes me wonder---***when do we not recognize Jesus*** in our lives? What does it ***take to open*** our eyes? When does God break into our lives? How does Jesus show up for us, today?

Here, Jesus is doing what he has done for them before, right? He's ***feeding*** them. ***Come and have breakfast***, he says. Bring some of those fish you caught.

Jesus does what we will celebrate today—***he meets them at Table.***
 He's feeds them, fish and bread,
 much like he ***fed the crowd of 5,000***, with five loaves and two fish.

Jesus meets us, right where we are today, doesn't He?
 He meets them as they are fishing,
 he meets them around a meal.
 And today--***Jesus meets us in our holy communion***, right?

Isn't that ***amazing?***
 We ***don't have to get our lives right*** to see Jesus.
 We don't have to have everything in order to meet our Lord.
Jesus meets us—wherever we are.

Jesus certainly meets Peter, right where he is.
 Peter was the ***one who denied*** knowing Jesus, three times.
 Jesus predicted it would happen in John 13:38,
 And it happens just as He said,
 Peter denies Jesus—three times!

So here after eating breakfast,
Jesus offers grace to Peter,
 by ***asking him three times***—Do you love me?
 He gives Peter three opportunities to atone for denying his Lord and friend.

In Greek there are ***four different words for love.***
 The English language has many deficits,
 one of which is we have only one word for love---
 so we say things like I Love Pizza, and I Love God—with the same word.

In Greek there is ***eros***, or romantic love, ***storge***, or parental love,
phileo, or brotherly love, and ***agape*** or unconditional love.
 C.S. Lewis wrote a great book on this called *The Four Loves*.

What's interesting is that Jesus asks Peter ***do you agape me?***
 And Peter says, Yes Lord, ***you know I phileo you.***
 Jesus asks again, do you agape me?
 And Peter says, Yes, Lord, you know I phileo you.

But the third time Jesus meets Peter where he is—he says
Do you phileo love me?
To which Peter responds, Lord you know that I do.

And what does ***Jesus ask*** of Peter?
 He asks him to ***feed*** my lambs, ***tend*** my sheep, ***feed*** my sheep.
 And Follow Him.

He is commissioning ***Peter as a Pastor—a shepherd,***
 Just as He himself is the ***Good Shepherd***, in John 10.

Our reading from the Book of ***Acts*** today,
 Has another important commissioning—a very unlikely one—
 of ***Saul, who will become the apostle Paul.***

Just like Peter—***Jesus meets Saul right where he is,***
Despite his despicable life!
 Saul is on the road to Damascus, ***continuing his persecution of Christians!***
 Jesus appears to him, and says ***“Why are you persecuting ME?”***
 He blinds Saul, who then goes through a discovery of Jesus,
 and his new life as what?
 A preacher, a pastor, a shepherd.

Saul is renamed Paul, and he will preach the Good News of Jesus Christ!
 Instead of persecuting Christians,
 he will bring people ***to follow Jesus!***

The ***Book of Acts*** chronicles his journey,
 As he finds churches, goes on mission trips, writes letters,
 and visits believers far and wide.

And just as ***Jesus tells Peter that he will die*** an untimely death,
(tradition says that he was crucified upside down)
Paul will be persecuted, imprisoned, beaten, shipwrecked,
 And struggle with an ongoing disability, a ‘thorn in his side’.

Jesus has already said that the greatest love
 is to ***lay down one’s life for a friend,***
 and he foreshadows that for his beloved disciple, Peter.

These followers of Jesus ***will not abandon*** their faith,
Because Jesus has faith in them!
 That promise helps them keep their faith,
 and tend and feed the sheep.

What does all this mean for us today?
 I believe it means that Jesus continues
 to ***meet us, right where we are***, today.

Jesus continues to meet us—in the ***Word*** of God.
 Remember John’s Gospel ***calls Jesus the Word*** of God,
 and John 20 reminds us of the ***power of God’s Word***.

Jesus also continues to meet us in the ***Sacrament of Communion***.
 Today, when we Celebrate the Lord’s Supper,
 And share the bread and cup,
 we are ***meeting our Lord and Savior Jesus***.
 We are ***communing*** with Jesus, and Christians everywhere.

As we are fed at the Lord’s Table,
 we are ***reminded of our calling***---to care for the people around us.
 To feed the lambs, tend the sheep, feed the sheep.
 To follow Jesus.

You know, many traditions call this table an ***altar***.
 But in our tradition,
 we call it ***the Lord’s Table***—or the same reason we decorate with an empty
 cross, not a crucifix that depicts Jesus on the cross.

We do not call this an altar.
 Because ***Jesus’ sacrifice was a once and for all*** gift,
 The ultimate, and final sacrifice.
 And that sacrifice saved us.
Jesus died on the cross to save us, over 2000 years ago.

Then he was then raised from death—so we honor an ***empty cross***.
 And we ***celebrate communion at the Lord’s Table***,
 Jesus giving of himself at the Last Supper,

and the way he appeared to his followers after the resurrection,
around a Table, in the breaking of bread.

It was this way on the road to ***Emmaus***,
and ***on the shore*** that day when they all went fishing.

You know another thing that is so important in this story?
In it we learn that it is ***NOT enough to just say we love Jesus***.

Did you catch that with Peter?

Jesus says *Do you love me?*

And Peter says, Lord, *you know that I love you....*

But, Jesus challenges him ***to show his love—by feeding the sheep***.

It is ***not enough to just believe*** in Jesus.

It is not enough ***to say*** we love Jesus.

Jesus asks us to ***put our faith into action***.

We are called to ***live out our love*** for Jesus—
by serving and loving and caring for others,
by tending and feeding the sheep.

This is ***what it means to follow our Lord, Jesus Christ***.

When Jesus says to Peter, Follow Me—

he is calling him to a new way of life.

We too are called to a new way of life.

A life of service.

At St. Bede's Episcopal Church in Santa Fe, New Mexico,
there is a hand-lettered sign that ***hangs over the door into the sanctuary***.

It says: **SERVANT'S ENTRANCE**.

There isn't any way in or out of that church except through the service door.
Christianity Today, Vol. 35, no. 10.

Isn't that perfect?

Isn't that our calling—to be servants?

Writer Philip Yancey notes that toward the end of his life,
Albert Einstein removed the portraits of two scientists—
Newton and Maxwell--from his wall.

He replaced those with ***portraits of Gandhi and Albert Schweitzer***.

Einstein explained that it was time to
replace the image of success, *with the image of service.*

Leadership, Vol. 16, no. 4.

We believe in the living God,
And the *presence of Jesus Christ*---meeting us wherever we are---today!

Our Savior still asks us---Do you love me?

If you do---feed my sheep.

And follow me.

Put your *faith into action.*

Be a servant, in my name.

Friends, hear the *Good News* of the Gospel today:

If we love Jesus, we follow Him,

By shepherding, serving, and loving.

And to that, all God's people said, Amen.