
Closure: Peter and John

John 21:1-25

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When someone has screwed up, how do we treat them?

A child who breaks a favorite dish?

An employee who steals and sells an important company secret?

A spouse who commits adultery?

A church member who sins and is repentant?

A disciple who publicly, three times, denies Jesus?

Today, people will talk about needing closure. We want things, particularly bad things, to have a definite ending that allows us move on with life.

In our text this morning, John will bring some closure, to a relationship and to a book.

Peter, the Faithless

(v.1-19)

Jesus is forgiving and calling Peter back to His ordained task.

Returning to Work

(v.1-14)

After the crucifixion and resurrection, some of the disciples seem to be returning to work.

Going fishing

(v.1-3)

¹ After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. ² Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. 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.

This is no casual fishing trip with Jesus. Through repetition, John emphasizes that Jesus is revealing Himself. There was something that Jesus wanted His disciples to see and something John wants us to know. There is something very about the Lord we are to learn and to respond to.

Seven of the disciples have joined Peter and his brother at the family business on the Sea of Galilee. John refers to it as the Sea of Tiberias. This may be because that was its common name by the time John wrote the book. But he is also wanting us to connect this event with that of John 6. There, Jesus feeds the five thousand with the dis-

ciples serving the miraculous provision and collecting the twelve baskets of leftovers. Now, with that story just briefly in mind, watch this one unfold.

Peter emerges right off as the one who is leading this group. I am sure they are wrestling with what the resurrection means. How is this going to impact them? It seems that they are beginning to scatter and drift back towards their old occupations. They are going back to what is familiar and easy. They are returning to work

There is a sort of in the moment impulsiveness to this isn't there. Now Peter is not talking about getting a pole and bobber and bait and sitting on the bank. He is talking about what he did for a living up till three and half years ago. So, the guys all jump in a boat, haul out the nets and labor all night. Fishing like this is hard work. Throwing over the nets and rowing the boat to drag the net. Pulling the nets in and then starting over. All night. And nothing. Empty handed.

Casting nets

(v.4-8)

⁴ Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered him, "No." ⁶ He said to them, "Cast the net on 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 of the quantity of fish. ⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. ⁸ The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.

Don't you just love this? Hey guys, how is it going? Caught any tidbits yet? They don't know who it is. "Throw the net on the other side. There are some there." he says. So they do. John doesn't record anything except their simply doing what He tells them to do. And the net is full. No it is more than full. There are so many fish, seven, full grown, strong men cannot pull the fish-filled net into the boat.

And John sees. "It's the Lord!" Peter either gathers up or throws on his garment, jumps into the water and swims ashore. It wasn't far. But here is the impulsive, impetuous Peter. The rest sensibly row the boat to the shore, dragging the netted fish behind them.

Jesus is showing them and John is showing us that without the resurrected, revealed Lord, all our labor is useless. But working at His direction will bring amazing fruitfulness. The flesh, the before life cannot produce spiritual fruit, the life after. The Old can point to the New, but it cannot cause the New. There is no need to take Jesus by force and make Him king (John 6). He is the King.

Eating breakfast

(v.9-14)

Now you have to see this scene in your mind's eye. A beach, a wet apostle, a boat dragging a bulging net and a fire with someone quietly cooking fish and bread.

⁹ When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out 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, 153 of them. And

although there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

"Time for breakfast, boys. Bring along some of the fish you caught." Peter wheels around, climbs up in the beached boat and bends mighty muscles to haul the net ashore. There it is. All those fish. Not just small ones either. Large fish. One hundred and fifty three fish. Someone counted them. And no broken net, either. What is the symbolical meaning here? There isn't any that I can see. It is simply meant to cause the reader to gasp. It is a huge haul. All because at the end of a long toiling night, as dawn is breaking, they do what the resurrected King says and get what He gives.

So they gather around the fire. O, you can see it in their eyes. They want to ask, "Is it really You?!" They know it is. They don't dare ask. It is hard for us to put ourselves in their place. They know He died. They can see the effects of the crucifixion. And they now know that He was raised. But it is still so unbelievable, so fantastic.

Till He serves the bread and fish. In that simple act, so evocative of so many miracles and so many meals and a last supper - yes, it is He.

This was the third time Jesus was revealed to the disciples. It is the third time John has said this in a very short space. So what does it mean? Is this merely, "See, we know Jesus was raised because..." Is something being revealed here? If so, what is it? It is not only in what we have seen already but in what follows.

Restoring the Apostle

(v.15-19)

As the meal comes to a close, Jesus looks around the seven until His gaze settles on Simon Peter.

Loving Christ through shepherding

(v.15-17)

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." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved 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.

First, I think this is around the fire with the rest listening in. There is leftover fish and bread and eight, full satisfied men. So this is not just for Peter's benefit, it is also for the benefit of the other disciples watching Peter and Jesus. And ultimately it is for us as well.

"Peter, do you love me more than these?" These who? Is Jesus pointing to the fish and bread? Is Jesus pointing to the boat, the nets, the gear of his job? No, I don't

think so. Jesus' hand points to the other disciples. "Peter, do you love me more than these other disciples do?"

Jesus asks Peter twice if he loves (*agape*) Jesus and Peter responds with "Yes, he loves (*phileo*) Jesus. We should be very careful making too big of a distinction between those words – the often made assertion that *agape* is the Greek for God's kind of love simply won't hold up – we are told not to *agape* the world and Jesus asserts that He *phileos* the Father. But when Jesus responds the third time with Peter's word and this seems to really disturb Peter, we should pay some attention to it.

Jesus has modeled in the last hours what He calls Peter and the rest to do. He has just shown them what it is like to love well and love much. He has met them where they are in their lives. He has given them simple directions. He has filled their nets. He has fed them bread and fish. He is what Peter is to do. He is what the apostles were to do. He is what we are to do.

The great motivation is love for Jesus. Yes, we are to love people. But lots' people love people who don't love God. If you do ministry primarily because you love people, you will eventually burn out. What will you do when you don't love the particular people around? No, love for God and for His glory is the only ministry sustaining power. Do you want to feed sheep? Then love Jesus.

The focus is on feeding the sheep. Jesus has given us the primary command for the care of His people. There are many things that need to be done in, for and with a flock, a gathered people. But God gathers His people so that they will be fed. In feeding them a wide variety of Biblical diet in a wide variety of Biblical settings by a wide variety of Biblical leaders while shepherding them for the love of God will be pleasing to God, and generally will produce growing and maturing sheep.

A threefold question, a threefold assertion of love, a threefold assignment for a threefold denial. Peter is restored to fellowship and to ministry.

Following Christ through death

(v.18-19)

But then an enigmatic statement and summons.

¹⁸ Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." ¹⁹ (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me."

Seven men hear this about one of them. John was there and recalls it. Jesus predicts how Peter will die. Peter had denied Jesus on the eve of the crucifixion. He is surely still filled with regret. Jesus stares deep into Peter's soul and says, "You missed my cross, but you will have the privilege of not missing your own." History tells us that Peter died as Jesus said. Peter was also crucified.

Peter, disciples, all of us – follow Jesus. Follow Him all the way through death if need be. And all along the way, till death do us part, feed the sheep for the love of God.

John, the Follower

(v.20-25)

John is bringing his book to a close. He has been the quiet, unassuming follower who has simply loved Jesus and tried his best to stay close. Watch how this flows...

¹⁹ ...and after saying this he said to him, "Follow me." ²⁰ Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them..."

Correcting the Record

(v.20-23)

John wants to correct the record. As he has grown old he explains why many thought he would never die.

²⁰ Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?" ²¹ When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" ²² Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!" ²³ So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?"

Ah, Peter, Peter. What are we going to do with you? John has been close to Jesus and has followed Him well. Why do you have to know what is going to happen to John? Why does it matter? Jesus' response makes it clear that we are to follow Jesus regardless of what others do or what God has willed for them. Peter, it is none of your business what John is going to do or how John is going to die. You just follow me.

But, the way Jesus put it left the impression that John would never die. Apparently, it was widely said that John was going to live until Jesus returned. You can imagine as the years rolled along and John continued to live even after all the other apostles were dying how this would spread. So, John points out that the report is wrong. What Jesus said was mis-heard. Jesus is not commending a long life to John; He is correcting Peter's focus on John.

Interesting way to close a book, don't you think? Here is the amazing realness of the Bible. It shows real people in real life dealing with misunderstanding and setting the record straight. Why is this so important? Because John is going to die.

Closing the Revelation

(v.24-25)

So he wants to maintain the integrity of his witness, his work and the Word. So much here and so much not.

This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

²⁵ Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

There it is. John is bearing witness about Jesus. What he has written is true. If he does not correct the impression that he is not going to die and does, then what? Is his whole testimony not true? He corrects the report to uphold the integrity of the testimony.

So much more to say. So much more that could be written. But written to bring us to belief. Written to reveal to us our crucified, risen and reigning King.

Reflect and Respond

Sometimes we fail. Sometimes we will disappoint. But in this third appearance of Jesus He is revealed as the restorer. What a sweet message that is, indeed.

This book is trustworthy. Its testimonies are true. What John wrote and we read is truth. It is our food, our life, our window to God.

And there is so much more...