

## Bible Study Guide: Week of 4-25-2022

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

### 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. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup>Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. <sup>10</sup>Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." <sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. <sup>14</sup>This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

<sup>15</sup>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." <sup>16</sup>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." <sup>17</sup>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. <sup>18</sup>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." <sup>19</sup>(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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The events of chapter 21 follow what many have assumed to be the “original” ending of the Gospel (see John 20:24-25). The assumption many make, therefore, is that Chapter 21 was a later addition or redaction. Although there is an air of finality about those verses, it is important to note that no ancient manuscripts of John’s gospel exist without chapter 21. In other words, even if it is not “original,” chapter 21 is certainly quite ancient. Also, the chapter ties up some important loose ends and marks a transition from the bodily ministry of Jesus to the ecclesial ministry of Jesus in the form of the community of disciples.

Note the transition in setting from Chapter 20 which took place “in the house where the disciples had met” (John 20:19). That was almost certainly the same room in Jerusalem where Jesus and his disciples gathered for their last evening together (see John 13:1ff). Here in chapter 21, the disciples have returned to Galilee (the Sea of Tiberias is another name for the Sea of Galilee). This is, of course, where Jesus’ ministry began and was the home region of many of the disciples, including Peter.

Interestingly, nowhere in John’s gospel up to this point have we been told that any of the disciples were fishermen. The call of the first disciples in John 1 comes not by the Sea of Galilee, but rather by the Jordan River. Andrew, Peter’s brother, was one of the first disciples. He had been a disciple of John the Baptist, but followed Jesus at John’s pronouncement of Jesus as “the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Compare the call story of the first disciples to that of Luke (Luke 5). There, we hear a similar story to this one: A miraculous catch of fish, followed by a bold call to follow Jesus. For John, that scene takes place here *after* the resurrection of Jesus and it is what prompts the disciples to go and spread the good news.

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Notice also the common theme in the post-resurrection appearance stories that they didn’t recognize Jesus at first. Similarly to Luke 24, the story of two disciples meeting Jesus on the road to Emmaus, where the disciples recognized Jesus “in the breaking of the bread,” here the disciples whom Jesus loved recognized Jesus by the sheer abundance of fish. There are strong echoes of John 6—the feeding of the 5,000—here in this story.

Peter’s almost comical action of girding himself with his outer garment serves at least two purposes. It is important to note that the NRSV translation misses the point slightly. Peter, upon hearing that Jesus is near, puts on his outermost garment, since he had stripped it off earlier while fishing. The word used can mean “naked,” but can also simply mean “wearing only the undergarment.” His action is the opposite of what we would expect, however. In our time, one would probably take off clothes to go swimming, not put them on. The first purpose this detail serves is to show Peter’s wild abandon in getting to Jesus. He is so desperate to reach him, he acts before thinking. Think, for instance, of Peter’s slightly buffoonish remark during the foot washing: “Lord, not just my feet but my head and hands also!” Peter always seems one step ahead of himself. The second purpose this detail serves, though, is more theological. Peter’s actions are reminiscent of the first man and woman in the garden in Genesis 3. After disobeying God they made fig leaf clothing for themselves and hid themselves when they heard God passing by because they were naked and ashamed. Here, Peter, after denying Jesus, hides himself with his outer garment upon hearing that Jesus is present. The verb used to describe Peter’s action of “putting on” or “girding himself with” the garment is the same verb used of Jesus’ action at the foot washing—“girding himself with a towel.”

The very specific “153 fish” has intrigued commentators since ancient times. Some have interpreted this number allegorically, as a symbol for fullness of the church or the nations of the world. In any case, what is most important is that many fish were caught and that the net was not torn despite this haul. Deeply symbolic of the mission of the church, as well, is the word “hauled” to describe Peter’s action. It is the same verb Jesus used earlier to describe

God's action regarding bringing people to faith: "No one can come to me unless the Father *hauls/draws/draws* that person." (John 6:44) Here it is the disciples who are doing the "hauling," continuing the mission of Jesus himself. Note the mention of the charcoal fire. This recalls the charcoal fire present in John 18:18 when Peter warmed himself while denying Jesus three times. The word for "charcoal fire" occurs only in these two places in the New Testament, so it is certainly no accident that in the coming passage Peter will have an opportunity to claim Jesus in love three times.

**<sup>15</sup>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." <sup>16</sup>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." <sup>17</sup>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. <sup>18</sup>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." <sup>19</sup>(He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."**

As I mentioned above, Peter has the chance to be restored to fellowship after his threefold denial. Jesus repeatedly presses Peter about his love and repeatedly charges him with the care and feeding of his "sheep." Just as the language about bread and fish naturally drew us back to consider John 6, here the language about sheep draws us back to remember John 10—the Good Shepherd discourse. Peter is invited back into relationship with Jesus—a relationship which Jesus earlier described as intimate knowledge and trust between sheep and shepherd. Not only is Peter called to love and be loved by Jesus again, but he is called to love those others whom Jesus calls his sheep.

The last portion of this passage is a rather ominous prediction of Peter's death as a martyr. Tradition maintains that Peter was crucified, perhaps upside down. Following Jesus, then, for Peter, means not only imitating his life and love, but also his suffering, death, and glory. This fulfills Jesus' words in John 13:36. When Peter asked him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus answered him, "You will not follow me now, but later you will be able to follow." Now is the time for Peter to do just that. He could not follow Jesus to the cross on that fateful Friday, but he would follow Jesus to death and to new life beyond.

#### **Discussion/Reflection Questions:**

- 1. Why do you think Peter and the others went fishing? Why do you think Jesus chose that occasion to appear to them again?**
- 2. Here Jesus was made known to the disciples in bread and fish; in a miraculous catch. In Luke 24, Jesus was made known "in the breaking of the bread." How is Jesus made known to us in the church today?**
- 3. What does it mean for Peter and for us to "tend and feed Jesus' sheep and lambs?" What does it mean to follow Jesus as he commands Peter to do?**