

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Trustworthy

As For You...Follow Jesus!

(John 21:1-22)

Study #12

Introduction: The end of the story, followed by...

Last Sunday, we remembered Jesus' cross and then rejoiced to celebrate the glorious resurrection message of Easter. And as fine a place to end the story as the resurrection would have been, John didn't end there.

But then, neither did Matthew end his Gospel with the resurrection. He took us to a mountain in Galilee where Jesus gave His followers - then and now - a Great Commission to ***"make disciples."***

Nor did Luke, who ended his Gospel with Jesus calling His followers - then and now - to take the gospel to the whole world.¹

They ended their books about Jesus, not with an event, but with a call to action, with a verb. Today, we turn to the last chapter of John and watch as Jesus interacted with His disciples.

Out of the limitless supply of stories about Jesus John could have told (21:25), he ended with the stories in front of us today - stories we need to hear.

¹ There is debate about the ending of Mark. If the longer version is Mark's actual ending (Mark 16:20, even including the final words that may appear at the end, *"imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation"*), he ends his Gospel with a word about a walk to Emmaus, Jesus' appearances, and the promise of power. If the book ends at verse 8, with ***"And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone,***

We aren't surprised that we start off with a fishing story. After all, fishing is a big part of following Jesus.

Go Fish (vv. 1-7)

"I'm Going Fishin'" (vv. 1-3)

Seven of eleven disciples (vv. 1-2)

[1] After these things Jesus revealed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias,² and He revealed Himself in this way. [2] Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee³, and two others of His disciples were together.

Galilee had been home to all the apostles, with the exception of Judas.⁴ And Galilee was where they had all met Jesus.

Now, after all that had happened in the weeks since the resurrection, the gloom of Good Friday was long gone. They were out of the Jerusalem pressure cooker, back on home turf in Galilee.

There in Galilee, Simon Peter had a great idea.

The disciples got "skunked" (v. 3)

[3a] Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing."

Today, at least in some circles, the words, *"I'm goin' fishing"* is the ultimate kick back and take-it-easy phrase. But that was not what Peter meant.

Peter was a professional fisherman. For him, ***"I'm going fishing"*** meant, *"I'm going to work."*

for they were afraid." - as I am drawn to think - then Mark left the story unfinished and handed off to us a pen, inviting us to write our own Jesus-is-alive ending.

² When John wrote his Gospel, Tiberias Caesar was the ruler of the Roman Empire. The lake was temporarily named after the Emperor.

³ James and John. Once again, John doesn't identify himself by name.

⁴ Iscariot = "a man from Kerioth" a city in Judea.

Six of the other apostles joined Peter and they all went fishing - meaning that they were going to be working.

They didn't take rods and reels. This was not fly fishing with barbed lures. They fished with heavy nets.

And since fish bit better at night, they threw their nets all night long. And on that night, these pros didn't get so much as a nibble.

[3b]...They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing.

I can relate. And there's a reason why I haven't been fishing for a very long time. I was always a terrible fisherman. I regularly got "skunked" on lakes that were famous for fish-catching.

So, these disciples and I have the shared experience of not-catching. And I never had happen to me what happened to them here.

Fishing with Jesus (vv. 4-7)

A risky greeting (vv. 4-6)

[4] But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.⁵ [5] So Jesus said to them, "Children, you do not have any fish to eat, do you?"

Jesus did things here that I would never do.

First, He called the fishermen "**children**." When you next go to Calavaras Lake and watch seven men coming in from a night of fishing, I do NOT recommend that you address them as "*Children*." It'll get their attention, but not in the way you hope.

Second, Jesus pointed out their lack of success in fishing.

Again, if you see seven guys walking away from their boat with no fish, it isn't a great idea to yell, "*Hey, I see you didn't catch any fish!*"

Now, to the credit of these men, they didn't mouth off. They just said, "**NO.**"

Then, Jesus offered a suggestion, which is a third thing I don't recommend.

There is nothing more frustrating to fishermen or plumbers than listening to an arm-chair quarterback spout advice from the sidelines.

He told them, **[6a] "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find the fish."**

Here is this guy telling professional fishermen who have been fishing all night long, how to fish.

Again, to their credit, they took the Stranger's advice. After all, it wasn't like they were going to catch less fish than they already had.

[6b]...So they cast it, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great quantity of fish.

Yes, they had no doubt fished from the left and right hand side of the boat all night long. It wasn't some technique that made the difference. It was Someone who made the difference.

As soon as the Apostle John saw the fish racing for the nets, something clicked.⁶

"Hey, isn't that Jesus?!" (v. 7)

[7a] Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord."

John was the first to perceive that this catch was Jesus' work. Peter was the first to do something about it.

⁵ Remember Mary's difficulty identifying Jesus in chapter 20; also, the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, in Luke 24.

⁶ Jesus had performed a similar miracle earlier, recorded in Luke 5.

[7b]...So 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.

And why did he throw himself into the sea? Because he wanted to get to Jesus, and the quickest way to get to the shore was to swim.⁷

Jesus performed a miracle here. And it was the exact same miracle He performed when He had called Peter and Andrew and James and John to follow Him.⁸

THEN He made sure that His followers knew that *fishing* - for people! - was close to His heart.

NOW, Jesus was making sure His disciples remembered that *fishing* was close to His heart.

In their gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke all quoted Jesus saying to those first disciples: *“So far, you’ve been fishing for fish. Follow Me, and you’ll catch people who will join you in following Me.”*

John is the only Gospel writer who doesn’t have that comment. But we hear that comment in this, the last miracle John recorded: Fishing is a big part of following Jesus.

Of course, fish aren’t lost at sea, and fishermen aren’t doing fish any favors by fishing.

But people without Jesus are lost. And followers of Jesus who fish for people who are far from God go fishing for them out of love.

The post-resurrection appearances of Jesus we saw last Sunday to Mary and to the disciples fostered FAITH. This get-together with Jesus at the beach fostered FISHING.

And by “fishing” I mean to say, tell others the good news about Jesus. Evangelize.

There are people you know who don’t know the good news message that if they believe in Jesus for eternal life, He will give them the gift of eternal life.⁹

Your Sea of Tiberias is your life. Cast your net.

Go fishing at work, in your neighborhood, at school, or at the gym. Fish as you lovingly share the good news that Jesus saves. Lovingly, sensitively, creatively, graciously, bring your friends to Jesus.

That was just the beginning of that morning’s activity at the beach. We listen as it continues.

Have Faith (vv. 8-13)

Jesus Provided a Great Catch (vv. 8-11)

[8] But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about two hundred cubits away, dragging the net full of fish. [9] So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already made and fish placed on it, and bread. [10] Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish which you have now caught.” [11] So Simon Peter went up and hauled the net to land, full of large fish, 153; and although there were so many, the net was not torn.

That last comment, the counting of the fish, lends credibility to the story. There weren’t a lot of fish or even “...about a hundred and fifty-ish fish.”

No. They were precise to the last fish - one hundred and fifty three.¹⁰ That was a lot of fish!

⁷ That phrase, “...and threw himself into the sea” has prompted some to wonder if Peter was trying to harm himself, overwhelmed by guilt over past failures. I don’t think that was what was going on.

⁸ See Luke 5:4-11.

⁹ See John 3:16; 1 John 5:13; Luke 16:1-13; Acts 1:8; Galatians 6:10; Colossians 4:6; 2 Timothy 4:5.

¹⁰ Scholars have made lots of guesses about the significance of “153.” (1). The ancients believed that there were 153 kinds of fish, indicating that the appeal of the Gospel was universal. (There isn’t much evidence that ancient peoples believed

Here's the thing. They caught nothing all night. At Jesus' word they cast on the other side of the boat and instantly caught an overflowing net full of fish.

As they prepared to eat, John tells us in deliciously memorable words how Jesus served them breakfast.

Jesus Provided Fish and Bread (vv. 12-13)

[12] Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples ventured to inquire of Him, "Who are You?" knowing that it was the Lord. [13] Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise.

If those words sound familiar, it is because they are just how John described Jesus breaking the bread and handing out the fish at the feeding of the five thousand. (John 6)

We've already tied in the fish-catching with Jesus' first calls to His disciples to *fish* for people. Here, with the enormity of the catch, Jesus was vision-casting for A GREAT CATCH OF FISH.

Jesus wanted the disciples to connect what He was doing *here*, with the fish, with what He had done *there*, with the crowds.

At the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus multiplied fish and loaves and fed a great crowd of people.

On that day He was responsible for seeing that everyone got all the food they needed. He provided.

On that day, the disciples understood that they could depend on Jesus to meet their needs as they served Him.

this.) (2). If you add the numeric value of the Greek letters in the name "Simon" (76) to the numeric value of the Greek letters in the word "fish" (77), you get one hundred and fifty three. (3). The Trinity is represented by multiplying 3 and 50 and then adding 3. I think the point is that they caught a verifiably large number of fish.
¹¹ Notice that Jesus already had a charcoal fire going with fish on the grill, ready for the seven disciples to eat when they got to shore. We don't know where Jesus' fish came from, but it seems to me to be a beautiful picture of grace and kindness

Here at the beach, the disciples re-learned that lesson.

They caught, by Jesus' provision, what they wouldn't have caught without Him. Going forward, they will need to depend on Him if they want to see any fruit / fish from their labors.

And today, you and I affirm the same thing.

Jesus told us, ***[John 15:5] "...apart from Me, you can do nothing."***

Unless we abide in Him, we won't become more like Jesus. Unless we depend on Him, we won't produce the fruit of bringing our friends to Jesus. We must trust Him for any and all results from our service to Him.¹¹

So, so far the Lord has given all disciples two marching orders
Go Fish. Have Faith.

Next, Jesus turned His attention to the Apostle Peter (Note is it "Simon" here) and gave a third piece of guidance, helpful to us all.

Get a Fresh Foot-Washing (vv. 15-17)

Jesus and Peter: Round One (v. 15)

[15a] Now when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?"¹²

In other words, "*Simon - NOT "Peter" - do you love Me more than the other disciples love Me?"* It was a good question because Simon had claimed that he did love Jesus best on the night before Jesus died.

that He had food for them to eat after they had labored at His bidding. He provided their daily food. Just so, we can trust Jesus to provide us what we need. We can be content with what we have because what we have is exactly what Jesus deems we need. Jesus is trustworthy. Trust Him.

¹² Note Mark 14:29, where Peter claimed that even if all the others fell away from Jesus, he wouldn't.

The word for *love* that the Lord used here is the uniquely Christian Greek word *agape* - "*Simon, do you love Me unconditionally?*"

The question might have surprised Simon, but he answered quickly.

[15b] "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You."

That was a good response. But it didn't *exactly* answer Jesus' question.

For one thing, Simon didn't tell Jesus that he loved Him more than the others did. For another, Simon didn't use the word for love that Jesus used. He used another Greek word for love (*phileo*), that speaks of a brotherly affection.

But Jesus accepted the answer, and then told Simon, **[15c] "Tend My lambs."**

I imagine Peter thinking to himself, "*Well, that was random*" as he went back to doing whatever it was he had been doing.

But Jesus wasn't done. The Lord asked Peter a question that was nearly identical to the first question.

Jesus and Peter: Round Two (v. 16)

[16a] He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?"

The only change in this second question was that Jesus didn't ask Simon to compare his love for Him with the love of others for Him. It was more absolute. Binary. "*Do you or don't you love (agape) Me?*"

Simon gave exactly the same answer.

[16b] "Yes, Lord; You know that I love (phileo, again) You."

To which Jesus replied, **[16c] "Shepherd My sheep."**

I'm guessing that Simon was surprised that Jesus had asked him the same question twice. He was undone when Jesus asked the same question a third time.

Jesus and Peter: Round Three (v. 17)

[17a] He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love¹³ Me?"

Ouch!

[17b]...Peter was hurt because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You."¹⁴

With that, Jesus repeated what has become by now a formula.

[17c] "Tend My sheep."

Especially in light of his recent three-fold denials, Simon had to know that Jesus was calling him to repentance. After the third question, he would have heard the rooster crowing in the background.

Jesus' three questions would have hurt. But the pain was an essential part of Simon Peter's necessary restoration.

The questions forced him to see his denials for the ugly things they were. Here, Simon came to grips with his failure, with his sin.

And in the moment of this exchange with Jesus - at the precise moment of Peter's recognizing the enormity of his failure - he received a fresh foot-washing from Jesus.

This exchange between Jesus and Peter speaks powerfully to me because, like Peter, I'm familiar with failure and sin.

¹³ Here, Jesus asked Peter the question with the Greek *phileo*, not *agape*.

¹⁴ C.S. Lewis once wrote, "*On the whole, God's love for us is a much safer subject to think about than our love for Him.*" Peter would have certainly agreed, as do we.

I could tell you of on-going battles I have with...
 ...selfishness and greed (which the Bible says amounts to idolatry.
 (Colossians 3:5)
 ...grumbling and complaining. (God considers this a major failure. See
 Numbers 14; Philippians 2:14)
 ...to act without praying.
 ...to speak when I should be silent, to be silent when I should speak.

And I could go on.

I'm not proud of those failures, past or present. But they are all
 a part of my story.

It's a story God wants to redeem for His glory, just like He
 wanted to weave Peter's three denials into a story of grace and service
 on the way to restoration.

He wants to do the same with the stories of struggle in my life
 and in yours.

Don't miss the conclusion of each of Jesus' questionings. All
 three times, He told Simon / Peter, *"Take care of people. Serve. Fulfill
 your ministry."*

The Lord took a man who had failed, drove him to face that
 failure, and then recommissioned him to serve people in His Name.

What does Jesus say to us, today, who fail? *"Own up to your sin.
 Turn from it. Turn back to Me. Serve again. Follow Me."*

In the language of Jesus taking up the basin and towel to wash
 His disciples' dirty feet, this is what it looks like to ask Jesus to wash
 your feet.

Jesus has washed my feet repeatedly over the years and over
 the last few days. He will wash your feet, too.¹⁵

¹⁵ Those of us who fail should take heart from Solomon's wisdom:
*[Prov. 24:16] For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again,
 But the wicked stumble in time of disaster."*

¹⁶ Some traditions tell us that Peter was crucified upside down, at his own request.

Then, as Jesus went on to tell Peter, the first command remains
 the central command: Follow Jesus.

You, Follow Jesus! (21:18-23)

Follow - no Matter What (vv. 18-19)

***[18] "Truly, truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you
 used to put on your belt and walk wherever you wanted; but when
 you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will
 put your belt on you, and bring you where you do not want to go."
 [19] Now this He said, indicating by what kind of death he would
 glorify God. And when He had said this, He said to him, "Follow Me!"***

Throughout his life, Peter had enjoyed a lot of freedom to do
 what he wanted to do when he wanted to do it. Jesus let Peter know
 that in the future he won't enjoy that freedom.

He will suffer the limitations of beatings and imprisonment.
 Peter will eventually die a martyr's death. History tells us that he died
 like Jesus did, by crucifixion.¹⁶ He was faithful to the end.¹⁷

Jesus' charge to Peter? ***"Follow Me."*** Period. No matter what
 may come, no matter how difficult the assignment is.

That is His charge to us, too.

Is your life tough? Are you facing huge temptations? Relational
 stresses? Problems in your marriage? In your closest friendships?
 Problems at work? With your health?

Jesus is not unsympathetic. He cares and hurts with you in your
 pain. He'll walk with you through all these valleys. But your pain
 doesn't give you a "pass" from following.

¹⁷ Eventually, Peter did fight the good fight. By letting Peter know that he would
 one day NOT deny, Peter was no doubt encouraged. He now had a vision for future
 faithfulness. There is hope, not for perfection, but for real change in this life for the
 believer who walks with Jesus.

FOLLOWING Jesus when you're in pain unleashes the Holy Spirit to shape your character.

FOLLOWING Jesus when it is hard to follow Jesus adds reality to your witness.

FOLLOWING Jesus when suffering in any way or when opposed brings great reward from God.

Peter understands. He is to follow Jesus, despite failures and regardless of suffering. Follow no matter what.

And then John records one final side conversation Jesus and Peter had about following.

Follow - no Matter What Others Do (21:20-23)

"Lord, what about him?" (vv. 20-21)

[20] Peter turned around and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them - the one who also had leaned back on His chest at the supper and said, "Lord, who is the one who is betraying You?" [21] So Peter, upon seeing him, said to Jesus, "Lord, and what about this man?"

I think that there was more than simple curiosity prompting Peter's question.

Adversity is always hard to bear. It is especially hard if you are the only one bearing it. It's true. Misery really does love company.

Peter wanted to know, *"Is John also going to die a martyr's death? Is he going to suffer, too, like I will?"*

You and I know that John did suffer greatly for Jesus. He endured exile on the island of Patmos for his faith. He may have experienced other great hardships and persecutions.

But Jesus didn't inform Peter about any of that. In fact, Jesus didn't respond as Peter probably had expected Him to at all.

"Peter, You, follow Me" (vv. 22-23)

[22] Jesus said to him, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!"¹⁸

And that is John's version of Matthew's **[28:18] "Make disciples of all the nations!"** Jesus gave a uniquely personal great commission to Simon Peter and to all of us, **"You follow Me."**

Conclusion:

The path John was to follow was irrelevant to Peter. Jesus had a unique path for both John and Simon Peter to follow.

So, I am to do what I believe Jesus has called me to do. You are to do what you believe Jesus has called you to do.

By obeying the calling Jesus gave Peter, we are rescued from two dangerous temptations and are released into glorious freedom.

One, each of us simply following Jesus rescues us from the temptation to assume that we must have the same ministry stewardship that someone else has. Not true.

And it frees us from anyone else assuming that they can tell us what our ministry stewardship before God is.

Two, each of us simply following Jesus rescues us from the temptation to assume that others should have the same ministry stewardship that we have. Not true.

And it frees us from the burden of having to identify for anyone else what their ministry stewardship before God is.

¹⁸ John adds, **[23] Therefore this saying went out among the brethren that that disciple would not die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but only, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?"**

No. I am to do what Jesus has put on my heart to do, and you are to do what Jesus has put on your heart to do.

God has placed before each of us good works to do for Him.

We are each to walk in those good works that are particularly fit for our desires, talents, giftedness, and opportunities. (See Ephesians 2:10)¹⁹

The genius of God's plan is that when His people are each "following Jesus" His mission moves forward and the the work gets done, we find great fulfillment in doing what God designed us to do, and God gets all the glory.

¹⁹ See also Colossians 4:17 where Paul mentions Archippus, a member of the church there who was to fulfill the ministry stewardship (never identified) that had been given to him in the Lord.