

Raised To Life – Raised to Follow

April 23, 2017 - Pastor Alex Kranjec

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. 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."

- John 21:15-19 ESV

Introduction

So, this week marks the return of NFL football! Wait, what? Isn't it only April!? Yes, but we have the NFL draft this week, and it's in Philadelphia! And I'm giddy about it! I'm sorry for you non-football fans. You'll have to humor me for a moment.

The NFL is a massive operation. This draft alone will cost \$25 million dollars and bring in over \$85 million in for the city. Over 6 million people will tune in on TV and an estimated 200,000 people, more than both Pope Francis and Hillary Clinton gathered, will descend on the Parkway, to watch 21 year old guys get selected, directed, and paid! The first round rookies, for example, will get paid anywhere from \$8 to \$28 million dollars. All this in hopes that they will be the next generation of stars to bring their team a championship. Here's to hoping for the Eagles drought to end!

The NFL is a massive operation. With revenue of over \$13 billion dollars! That's enough money to buy the entire Eagles' franchise over 5 times! Or enough money to make a Star Wars movie 29 times, purchase 37 Boeing 747s, or if you're into shoes, you could get 1.3 million pairs of the world's most expensive shoe - Louis Vuitton's Manhattan Richelieu at \$10,000 a piece. OK, so the NFL is a huge.

The point is, the NFL has a lot of followers! Maybe you are one of them this morning. Or maybe you follow other things - like fashion, popular culture, politics, or maybe you're a foodie, or an animal lover, or you follow social justice issues, or

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whatever. We all desire to attach our lives to something greater than ourselves. We were built to follow. With two kids now, I love watching how Sarah, our 10 month old, loves to follow around her older sister.

We were made to follow. To connect our lives to a bigger story. To derive our meaning from something bigger than ourselves. We all want to be great. We want to follow something that will last. Something unlike sports, or other things I mentioned. See, in sports, someone always goes home a loser, right? Us Eagles fans know a little about that... In politics, there's always a winner or loser. Life is often played in that way, isn't it?

And here we have Peter. This is profound. For all intents and purposes, Peter lost. He was the one who was extremely confident in himself. He was the one who spoke up in class with the right answers to Jesus' questions. He promised he wouldn't deny Jesus, that even if all others fell away, he would follow him to death. He attempted to defend Jesus with a sword when they came to arrest him. And he even followed Jesus after He had been arrested. Yet, he publicly denied Jesus three times and many believe he wasn't present at the crucifixion, likely abandoning Jesus in His darkest hour in shame.

After the resurrection, Peter even gets a glimpse of the empty tomb, and walks away perplexed. The text says he still hadn't understood (John 20:9). So, they go fishing. They go back to what they knew. I can imagine the confusion, the doubt, the shame, the fears. They had you to understand and experience the reality of life after the resurrection. So what do they do? They go back to all that they knew life to be about - fishing.

It's in that context, the ordinary, every day lives of the disciples, that Jesus appears to them. It's a direct parallel to the first time Jesus called his disciples. And I love Peter's response - he jumps out of the boat and swims to the shore. Peter has enough confidence in Jesus' love for him, that even in the midst of his biggest mistake, he runs (or swims) to Jesus.

Do you know Jesus like that this morning? Are you confident that no matter where you are, what you've done, or what you are struggling with, that Jesus loves you? That he takes the initiative and comes to you right where you are - in the midst of whatever ordinary, difficult, frustrating, parts of life we are living today, Jesus comes right where we are. There's nothing we need to do, other than believe.

In **John 15:16** Jesus says, *"You have not chosen me, I have chosen you."*

1. Jesus Comes To Us Where We Are

You see, Peter, in all of his strength, still failed Jesus. Yet in the midst of Peter's greatest moment of weakness, Jesus came to him. **Romans 5** says, "*when we were powerless, Christ died for us.*"

It wasn't just Peter, following the resurrection Jesus:

1. Came to Mary as a gardener - He was so ordinary the she did not recognize him at first.
2. Ate with the disciples. They didn't know it was him at first - they needed a fishing miracle to see it.
3. Came as a stranger and walked a whole day explaining the scriptures with a few of his disciples before they recognized him.
4. Came to his disciples who were afraid and hiding behind closed doors. He let them touch him, calmed their fears!

2,000 years later, the resurrected Christ is still coming to us, right where we are! He comes in the midst of everyday, in the good, and in the bad of our lives. He walks with us, He eats with us, He meets us in the ordinary, and He finds us when we are hiding, and afraid, and uncertain of the future.

No matter where you are today, the resurrected Christ is coming to you, and inviting you to follow.

2. Jesus Invites Us to Follow Him Into Holiness

When Jesus first called Peter it says in Matthew 4, that "*at once they left their nets and followed Him.*" That word "left" there literally means "abandoned." They abandoned their past associations, beliefs, and allegiances, and committed their lives to the way of Jesus - to what we would call discipleship. But, why then does Jesus offer the invitation again here?

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You see, our justification is finished. Through the work of Jesus on the cross, and the resurrection, our need to be justified has been accomplished. Yet, our holiness is an ongoing process. **Holiness is the lifelong process of the kingdom being formed in us.** When I see the resurrected Christ come to Peter, I see Jesus saying, "I'm not done with you Peter, follow me." And frankly, I believe that's what I need to hear every day.

Christianity has never been, and will never be about a one time decision. We're glad if you check off the card by saying you're making a decision to follow Jesus. But, we'd be doing you a major disservice if you believed that's what it was all about. That is just one of the thousands of small decisions you will make to follow Jesus the rest of your life.

Weight Loss Story I don't want to toot my own horn here, but a lot of people have been asking me if I've lost weight. So, I'll just make this public and ease all your fears. I have lost 35 pounds over the last year. I'm not sick or dying or anything. And frankly, I haven't exercised but a handful of times in that year. What's my secret? Small, daily decisions that over time amount to big life change. That's it. I track everything I eat. I've learned portion control, and macronutrients, but overall, it's just been about a disciplined approach every day. When I started this process, my goal was to get to 200. I was 230, and 30 pounds seemed like a lot of weight. I hit 200 back around Christmas, and I realized I hadn't set an aggressive enough of a goal. The point is, I've learned that life is way more about the small, ordinary, daily decisions that amount to big change over time. **It's what Eugene Peterson called "long obedience in the same direction."**

That's how we follow Jesus too. As we start to make small decisions daily, we start to look less like our old selves, and more like the new creation that Christ sees in us. **John Wooden, legendary NCAA basketball coach lived by this simple creed, "Make each day your masterpiece."** It's about stringing small, daily decisions together overtime that amount to big change.

I visited the Billy Graham Library in Charlotte, NC recently. Billy Graham's wife, Ruth Graham, is buried there. I was struck by what was written on her gravestone. It read "*end of construction - thank you for your patience.*" While riding down the highway years ago, Ruth noticed a sign on the road that read "end of construction - thank you for your patience." With a smile she said that these were the words she wanted on her gravestone.

God is still working on me. **We are all still under construction.** When we enter into a

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discipleship relationship with Jesus, we begin a life long process of construction. The resurrection is just the beginning.

All of this life is a journey of progressive sanctification. Construction isn't over yet! Most of us, if we're honest, hoped that signing on to the kingdom of God, would mean that we could go through life at a higher speed. We thought it meant fewer problems, a quicker ride on the highway to glory. But, in reality signing on to the kingdom meant that we would actually "lose our life" **Matthew 10:39** "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." It meant a lifelong commitment to construction - a journey of letting go of our life, and exchanging it for new life in Christ. That doesn't happen in an instant. That requires daily construction! "If any wants to become my followers, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up their cross daily, and follow me" (**Luke 9:23**). Following Jesus is a daily call to follow him.

You want the secret to living a resurrected life? You have to die! You have to give up your life, that you might find it in Jesus.

I love the way CS Lewis frames this:

The more we get what we now call "ourselves" out of the way and let Him take us over, the more truly ourselves we become...our real selves are all waiting for us in Him. It is no good trying to "be myself" without Him. The more I resist Him and try to live on my own, the more I become dominated by my own heredity and upbringing and surroundings and natural desires. . . . It is when I turn to Christ, when I give myself up to His Personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own. - C.S. Lewis

Powerful! But, I believe few actually choose this narrow road of giving up ourselves for the sake of the kingdom. **Few actually travel the path of construction.**

As a result, few are seeing the gospel renew the whole scope of their lives. There are many Christians who are seemingly spiritual people - they express love to the Lord, give, participate, lead... but their marriages are falling apart, their children despise them, their work is riddled with unethical behaviors, they gossip, slander, and divide the body of Christ. The mark of a true disciple, is one whose *whole* life is being redeemed and renewed by the gospel, not just ones spiritual compartment.

*"Christianity is not a way of doing certain things; it is a certain way of doing all things."
- Jimmy Draper*

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Christianity is not about what we do in a spiritual compartment over here, while the rest of our lives exists over there. **Romans 14:17**, *“For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”*

Galatians 5 asks the question, are we growing in “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control?” If you’ve been following Jesus for any length of time ask yourself, “Am I a more loving, internally joyful, peaceful, more kind, gentler, and self-controlled person than I was last year, or five years ago?” How does my marriage, my relationships, my business dealings, the quality of my work, reflect the gospel? Remember, it’s a construction project. It’s not usually pretty, and certainly doesn’t happen overnight. But over time, does your life look more like the fruits of the Spirit and less filled with “sexual immorality, impurity, lust, idolatry, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, anger, selfish ambition, division, envy, and so on?”

Look, I love church. And I am a product in a lot of ways of different church activities and church community. *But we don’t measure our growth in following Jesus by how much we fill up our “church compartment.”* Following Jesus will change us and will impact every area of our lives.

I also believe our world is ripe for the witness of Christians who actually live like followers of Jesus. Our nation is ripe for a revival at its heart! See, the more secular and selfish we become the greater the opportunity. But I don't think it's going to be a revival where everyone flood the church. And I don't think it's going to be because people came to see one or two powerful men/women of God. It's going to be because followers of Jesus carried the kingdom of light into the kingdom of darkness little by little, day by day.

“Christianity would be incredibly influential in our culture if Christians consistently lived their faith. Most non-Christians don't read the Bible, so they judge Christianity by the lives of the Christians they see. The problem is that millions of Christians don't live like Christians.” - Barna Group

“I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.” - Gandhi

3. Jesus Invites Us To Follow Him as Shepherds

If holiness is the measure of the kingdom at work in us, disciple making is the measure of the kingdom at work through us.

Just as Jesus initiated us, so now we go and initiate others. As we follow Jesus, where is it that he is going? Where is it that we are following him? He's going out into the world. He's at work to, as Luke 19:10 says, "seek and save the lost."

The problem is, many who identify as Christians aren't willing to follow Jesus there...

Of those who identified themselves as born again, 55 percent said that they had shared their faith in Christ with someone in the last year with the hope of seeing that person become a follower of Christ. Yet when they were asked if they have intentionally built a relationship with someone with the hope of being able to lead the person to Christ, only one in ten could affirm that they had. "Fewer than one in five said that they knew a non-believer well enough that they could share their faith with an individual in a context of trust and credibility." Another way this need has been dramatized is that it takes 100 members of a congregation to win 1.67 people to Christ in a given year. This indicates that a small percentage of people are active in a personal witness to the gospel. - Barna Group

How do we do this?

In Peter's original call Jesus invited him to "fish for men." Fishing has a very commercial aspect to it. It's a really rough occupation. Nets have to be mended and cleaned. Fishermen work at night and sleep during the day. They have to clean and sell fish. They had to be strong to cast heavy nets and pull them out of the water full of fish. It's a business of survival. Frankly, a fisherman kills fish to feed his family and sell to others. This sounds very cold to me. Very transactional and motivated by results and profit. Put simply, the fisherman's motivation is himself - his family, his needs, his profit.

But here, three times, Jesus commands Peter to feed His sheep. The image has gone from fisherman, now to shepherd. This is a radical shift for Peter. All of his life he

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had been a fisherman. He understood fishing. But now was being asked to shepherd.

A shepherd has to meet the needs of the flock - finding good pasture, located clean, peaceful water. A shepherd nurses back to health any sheep that are sick and protects them from thieves and predators. A shepherd uses his staff to count, guide, protect, and when needed, correct a wayward sheep. He's on call day and night!

The shepherd enters the pen through the gate, names his sheep and calls them to follow him, walks ahead of them assuring their safety, finds pasture for his flock and he is willing to protect his sheep even if it means dying for them. His total focus is not on himself, but rather on the needs of the sheep. The purpose of the shepherd's life, his mission, is to care for the health and well-being of the sheep.

Lest you think these verses are only for the pastors and church leaders, take note of the grammar use - verbs not nouns. Peter was being called by Jesus to tend and feed, not "be a pastor" or "hold an office." This also tells me, this is not a job we do, or a role we occupy, it's not a position we volunteer for, but rather this is the very essence of what it means to follow Jesus.

Along these same lines, let's look at the great commission.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. - Matthew 28:19-20, ESV

We are typically told that the great commission is all about going. Here's how we often hear it said, "GO! Making disciples, baptizing, teaching." There, the emphasis is on going and producing disciples. But in the original text, the word for "make disciples" is really just "disciple." It's like saying "Run!" or "Eat!" It's telling us that **we don't produce disciples, we only disciple**. It's an action word, not a noun. It's not a "person, place or thing" that is produced as a result of our going and making.

Don't miss this! The text is not telling us to make an object. You can't really "make" a disciple. Only the Holy Spirit can accomplish that. But what you can do, is disciple! It's not saying "go on a mission trip," or "go somewhere, and do this." The language suggests a continuous action that is already happening. It's saying, "as you go about

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your life.” **The great commission is not a command to go, it’s a command to disciple as you are already going.**

So, what Jesus is really saying is, “as you go about your life, as you go to work, as you raise your kids, as you engage friends and coworkers, as you do the mundane tasks of life, as you interact with society and culture, and as you do just about anything in your life, disciple, shepherd, feed, tend, build, care, restore, protect, meet needs, open your home, eat with people, be with children, care for the least of these! Work for the Kingdom! Follow Jesus!

Friends, there are over 1.5 million people in the Philadelphia area that have designated “none” when it comes to religious affiliation. There’s 1.5 million people that would rather not associate with any religion. They need someone to disciple them! That need someone to enter their world, walk alongside them, and demonstrate what it looks like to follow Jesus! They’ll probably never walk into a church. They increasingly believe that religion, and Christianity specifically, is irrelevant and extreme.¹

You know what they need more than anything? They need to encounter a Jesus-shaped disciple! Whether it’s at school, or on the sports field, or at the grocery store, or at the diner, or wherever. They need to encounter spirit-filled followers of Jesus on mission living their lives, “not for themselves, but for the benefit of others to the glory of God.”²

The resurrected Jesus is still at work today. He was sent on a mission in which we are invited to join him. We join him in extending his presence beyond the four walls of this building. He is present over the whole world, but becomes visibly present through his people. Just as he promised to be with us, literally “come along side,” we now go and we come alongside others, not as fisherman trying to produce, but as shepherds, loving, caring, and serving.

As we follow Jesus there, we demonstrate the good news through our changed lives and cultivate his presence among the world. We don’t have to look far for that opportunity. Many of us just have to look across the room, or down the hall, or across the street.

Conclusion

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Jesus said that Peter would die a martyr's death (verse 18-19). Knowing how he would die, Peter willingly choose to follow Jesus. You see, his greatness and purpose was found in following Jesus. Peter would go on to influence the lives of Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles. He was the main speaker on the day of Pentecost, operated in the power of God, boldly confronted the religious leaders, personally impacted the lives of Romans like Cornelius, and left a lasting legacy years beyond his unjust death. In following Jesus, Peter's life was a demonstration of the resurrected Jesus.

A Catholic Cardinal put it this way, ***"To be a witness is to live in such a way that our lives would not make sense if God did not exist."*** - Cardinal Suhard

How does your life make sense of the resurrected Jesus? How does your life point to the power of Christ at work in and through you?

Let's stand... I want to close with this...

Martin Luther King Jr, in his last sermon two months before his assassination, ironically spoke of what he'd like said at his funeral: "I'd like for somebody to say that day that Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to love somebody." He said that greatness comes from humble servitude and that when we follow Jesus he reorders our priorities. King spoke of our human desire to "beat our own drums" to be out front, to lead the parade, to be supreme. He called this the drum major instinct. Speaking of this human desire to be first, King said "Keep feeling the need for being important. Keep feeling the need for being first. But I want you to be first in love. I want you to be first in moral excellence. I want you to be first in generosity."

I know a man—and I just want to talk about him a minute, and maybe you will discover who I'm talking about as I go down the way because he was a great one. And he just went about serving. He was born in an obscure village, the child of a poor peasant woman. And then he grew up in still another obscure village, where he worked as a carpenter until he was thirty years old. Then for three years, he just got on his feet, and he was an itinerant preacher. And he went about doing some things. He didn't have much. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family. He never owned a house. He never went to college. He never visited a big city. He never went two hundred miles from where he was born. He did none of the usual things that the world would associate with greatness. He had no credentials but himself.

He was only thirty-three when the tide of public opinion turned against him. They called him a rabble-rouser. They called him a troublemaker. They said he was an

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agitator. He practiced civil disobedience; he broke injunctions. And so he was turned over to his enemies and went through the mockery of a trial. And the irony of it all is that his friends turned him over to them. One of his closest friends denied him. Another of his friends turned him over to his enemies. And while he was dying, the people who killed him gambled for his clothing, the only possession that he had in the world. When he was dead he was buried in a borrowed tomb, through the pity of a friend.

Nineteen centuries have come and gone and today he stands as the most influential figure that ever entered human history. All of the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned put together have not affected the life of mankind on this earth as much as that one solitary life. His name may be a familiar one. But today I can hear them talking about him. Every now and then somebody says, "He's King of Kings." And again I can hear somebody saying, "He's Lord of Lords." Somewhere else I can hear somebody saying, "In Christ there is no East nor West." And then they go on and talk about, "In Him there's no North and South, but one great Fellowship of Love throughout the whole wide world." He didn't have anything. He just went around serving and doing good.

We all desire to be great, to attach our lives to something that's bigger than us - something that matters. Greatness, as King has so eloquently said is found not in ourselves, but in allowing Jesus to reorder our lives. As we follow Jesus, we lay down our lives in service and love as shepherds to those around us.

1. What will be said about you at the end of your life?
2. Like Peter, is what you're living for worth dying for?
3. What needs to be reordered in your life this morning?
4. What small decisions this week do you need to make to follow Jesus where he is already at work?
5. Life is not just about what you do, it's about what you set in motion. What will outlive you? What will have a lasting, eternal impact? That's a mission worth living for!