

## Stand Alone – Next Steps!

4/28/19 – Pastor Randy

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John 21: 1-9; 15-17

Later, Jesus appeared again to the disciples beside the Sea of Galilee. This is how it happened. Several of the disciples were there—Simon Peter, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples. Simon Peter said, "I'm going fishing." "We'll come, too," they all said. So they went out in the boat, but they caught nothing all night. At dawn Jesus was standing on the beach, but the disciples couldn't see who he was. He called out, "Fellows,<sup>[c]</sup> have you caught any fish?" "No," they replied. Then he said, "Throw out your net on the right-hand side of the boat, and you'll get some!" So they did, and they couldn't haul in the net because there were so many fish in it. Then the disciple Jesus loved said to Peter, "It's the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his tunic (for he had stripped for work), jumped into the water, and headed to shore. The others stayed with the boat and pulled the loaded net to the shore, for they were only about a hundred yards from shore. When they got there, they found breakfast waiting for them—fish cooking over a charcoal fire, and some bread.

After breakfast Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," Peter replied, "you know I love you." "Then feed my lambs," Jesus told him. Jesus repeated the question: "Simon son of John, do you love me?" "Yes, Lord," Peter said, "you know I love you." "Then take care of my sheep," Jesus said. A third time he asked him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt that Jesus asked the question a third time. He said, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you." Jesus said, "Then feed my sheep.

John 21 begins with Peter and six other disciples deciding to go fishing on Lake Galilee. After a disappointing night of fishing, having caught nothing, they were returning to shore when they noticed a man on the beach. The unknown man asked if they had caught anything. In response to their reply that they had caught nothing, the unidentified man instructed them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat – not what these professional fishermen would have considered expert advice. Nevertheless, they did as they were told, and their nets became so full they couldn't haul them in. Peter, recognizing it was Jesus giving the instructions, immediately dove in the water and started swimming to shore. When they got to the shore they found Jesus with his own fish and bread already cooked!

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The irony in this scene is hilarious. Imagine being one of these disciples. You are a professional fisherman, who despite being equipped with training, a boat, fishing gear, and a work ethic that kept you fishing all night, you didn't catch one stinking fish! Then this man tells you to do something as silly as casting your nets on the other side of the boat which results in a catch your nets can barely contain. When you get to the shore, Jesus - the man with no boat, no nets, and no training - already has fish cooking!!

There has been a lot of speculation about the meaning behind Peter's statement, "I am going fishing." As the story progresses we see there is good reason to suggest that Peter had lost his sense of mission. I agree with Leon Morris when he writes, "...the general impression we are left with is that of men without a purpose." This was a vocational, not a recreational fishing trip. The disciples had only had two brief encounters with Jesus since the resurrection. He hadn't spent a lot of time with them yet. They were still not sure what to make of it all, so Peter decided it was time to go back to work.

**Like Peter, when we don't know our "next step" towards fulfilling our purpose, we retreat back to the familiar and comfortable.**

In order to understand the ensuing conversation between Jesus and Peter it is important to remember that this fishing miracle is very similar to one Jesus performed when he first called Peter to follow him. In Luke 5, Jesus was standing by the lake as a crowd was pushing to get closer to hear him teaching. Peter and some other disciples were washing their nets next to their boats on the shore. Jesus got into Peter's boat and asked him to push out a little to give him a platform from where He could teach the crowd without getting pushed into the water. When he was done speaking, he told Peter to go back out onto the lake and cast his nets again. Peter reluctantly agreed saying, 'We fished all night and caught nothing at all. But if you say so, I'll let down the nets.' When they did, they caught such a huge number of fish that their nets began to break and they had to call for the other boat to help haul them in. The boats were so full of fish they were sinking!! The first "fishing" miracle ended with Jesus saying to Peter, "From now on you will be catching men." In response Peter left everything and followed Him.

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This second “fishing” miracle concludes with Jesus repeating the question, “Do you love me more than these”? There are two possible ways of understanding the phrase “more than these”.

A. “Do you love me more than these other disciples love me?” The most common interpretation is that Jesus was saying, “Peter, you have said even if everyone else turns their back on me you will never do so. You professed that your love for me was greater than everyone else. Peter you promised that you would lay down your life for me if necessary, but then you denied me three times.” It is reasonable to see a connection between Peter’s thrice denial of Jesus and the fact that Jesus asked the question, “Do you love me more than these?” three times. Peter was quick to pledge his loyalty and now Jesus was making him think carefully about his answer. As attractive as this interpretation is I think there is a better alternative interpretation, or perhaps an additional interpretation. Maybe Jesus was asking...

B. “Do you love me more than you love these fish?” In this case Jesus was asking, “Do you love me more than occupation or appetite? Am I first?” There are a couple of reasons to prefer this interpretation. First, to ask Peter if he loves Him more than the other disciples – within the hearing of the other disciples – would only serve to stir up the competitive spirit among the disciples that Jesus had already worked to eradicate. (See Mark 10:35-45) It is hard to believe that Jesus would want to renew the conflict between them over who was best! Second, this interpretation makes more sense when we understand the relationship between Jesus’ words to Peter in each of these two “fishing miracles”. On the first occasion Jesus commissioned Peter to follow Him, and to do so Peter would have to give Jesus priority over his vocation. The purpose of the first fishing miracle was to demonstrate that Jesus could provide for Peter better than Peter could provide for himself.

Jesus question, “Do you love Me?” followed by His command, “Then feed My sheep” is a renewal of the commission he gave to Peter when he first called him to follow him. Peter was being called to demonstrate his love for Jesus by “feeding” others with the truth and love of Jesus. In these two passages Peter is called to “catch” and to “care” for men. The fishing incidents revealed

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glimpses of Jesus power and authority. His resurrection was the climactic revelation of His power and authority. Once Peter and the disciples understood the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection they were infused with a great sense of mission and purpose. They were compelled by the LOVE and LORDSHIP of Christ as revealed through Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus reproduced the "fishing miracle" he performed when he first called Peter in order to remind Peter, as He now re-commissions him, that He is able to provide for Peter better than Peter could provide for himself.

There are two main issues raised in this story that are foundational to you and I taking our "next steps" on our journey as followers of Jesus. The first is the necessity and priority of loving Jesus in response to His amends-making, curse-breaking death and resurrection. The second is the necessity of placing our trust in Jesus' ability to provide for us as we embrace His purpose for us.

### **1. The Necessity and Priority of Love.**

Jesus' recommissioning of Peter began with this all-important question: "Do you love me?" Before calling Peter to action, Jesus addressed his motivation. God is deeply concerned with our motivation. (See 1 Corinthians 13)

God has a mission or purpose for our lives. But we have to get the foundation in place before we begin to build. The foundation of the Christian's life is his Knowledge of God and his love for God. All doing flows from deep knowledge and devoted love. It is possible to have a clear sense of purpose and mission, yet without the proper motivation.

You can serve without love, but you can't love without serving. Christians can become so consumed with the work of God that they forget the God of the work. Christians' love for Christ dries up before their commitment to service dies out.

What does it mean to love God? Love is defined by our degree of devotion more than it is by our depth of passion. We often divide people into categories of thinkers, feelers, and doers. Peter was a feeler-doer. He needed to work on the thinking part. When Jesus first predicted he was going to die,

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Peter took Him aside and scolded Him, saying, That's the last thing that should ever happen and that will never happen! Later, when Jesus predicted that His disciples would desert Him Peter responded, "Not me! I will never desert you!" Jesus said, Yes you will Peter. In fact, tonight you are going to deny me three times!". Peter replied adamantly, "Never! I will die with you if I have to, but I will never renounce you." I think you know what happened.

Passion is good. Peter's passion was genuine, and it was evidence of true love for Jesus, but it needed to be accompanied by devotion – a commitment to follow and obey Jesus.

How do we keep the fire of our passion and devotion to God burning? You need to stay in his presence. What does that mean? It means you must cultivate your love in prayer, worship and study of His word. Communication with God; listening to Him remind you of His love for you, and expressing your love to Him, will reinforce your love for Him. The Holy Spirit pours out the love of God into our hearts as we open our mind and heart to the Spirit.

### **2. The Necessity of Trust.**

If Peter was going to fulfill his God-ordained mission to "catch" and "care" for others he was going to have to trust in Jesus ability to take care of him. What often keeps us from taking our next steps, following Jesus in the pursuit of His purposes for our lives is our competing concern for "feeding ourselves". We do have a responsibility to work to provide for our needs – that is part of God's purpose for our lives. Paul wrote that those who do not provide for the needs of their own household have denied the faith! He also told Timothy to instruct the Christians he pastored to work so they were to be able to provide for themselves rather than depend on others. My point is that fulfilling Jesus' purpose for your life does not necessarily require you to leave your vocation. It might, but your current vocation might be right where he wants you!! The choice before us is not between following Jesus and earning an income. The problem is when we our pursuit of income interferes with, or conflicts with, our pursuit of God's purposes. I have a friend, also named Randy, who left a successful contracting business behind in order to pursue the call of God into ministry.

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There is a flip side to this picture as well. There are some people who God redirected away from “preaching and teaching” ministry into business. One particular organization is doing a great work teaching businessmen and businesswomen to pursue business as a ministry. The org is called “Business as Mission”. Their mission is to resource businesses to help Christians

- Build profitable and sustainable businesses;
- Be intentional about Kingdom of God purpose and impact on people and nations;
- Focus on holistic transformation and the multiple bottom lines of economic, social, environmental and spiritual outcomes;
- Be concerned about the world’s poorest and least evangelized peoples.

It is not just about vocation either. This same principle applies to relationships. Christine and I have a female friend who is serving as a missionary in Ecuador. She dated a great guy in college. Their relationship grew to the point of contemplating marriage but they broke up for this reason: She was called to mission work overseas and he was called to be a Pastor stateside. She is now married to an Ecuadorian but she waited many years before God provided a husband. My point is this: She was willing to trust God with her relational needs, knowing that if she followed God’s, He was more than able to provide for all her needs.

We need to remember that when we follow Jesus, he will take care of us!! After all, He can catch more fish than we can and he doesn’t even need a boat, a net, or a license!

The fishing incidents revealed glimpses of Jesus’ love, power and authority. His crucifixion was the climactic revelation of His love. His resurrection was the climactic revelation of His power and authority. His crucifixion compels us to love Him. The resurrection compels us to trust Him. Prioritize love and trust and you will be ready to take the next steps, pursuing God’s purpose.

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