

Natalie W. Bell  
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**Do You Love Me?**  
**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,<sup>[a]</sup> 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<sup>[b]</sup> 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.”

All of this happens AFTER John’s Gospel *seems to end with Chapter 20!* In that chapter, Mary sees Jesus at the empty tomb on Easter morning, then Jesus appears to the disciples in a locked upper room, and again Jesus appears, when Thomas is with them.

After that John says: <sup>30</sup> *Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.* <sup>31</sup> *But these are written so that you may come to believe<sup>d</sup> that Jesus is the Messiah,<sup>e</sup> the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.*

It sounds like the end of the gospel, but it’s not!  
Today’s story may have been an *after thought*,  
But what if it’s like an *encore*, saving some of the best for last?

This amazing story shows us how the risen Jesus meets his followers—  
*right where we are.* No matter who we are, or what we’ve done.  
*Jesus offers us love, and grace.*

In this story, the disciples are *worn out after a week of emotional overload*—  
That big entrance into Jerusalem,  
the Last Supper,  
Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion,  
and then three days later—an empty tomb,  
and Mary announcing his resurrection!  
Then the disciples see the risen Jesus in a locked upper room--twice!  
Talk about a *roller coaster of emotion*--- love, grief, shock, hope!

*What do you do* when you are emotionally overloaded?  
For many people, we just *put one foot in front of the other* and keep going.  
We throw our legs over the edge of the bed, and get up for another day, right?

And doesn’t grief often cause us to do what’s *most familiar*?  
like *going back to work, or keeping the usual routine*?

I wonder if that’s what’s happening here--  
when Peter suggests to these fishermen that they go fishing again?

After all, it's been *a crazy week*,  
 And fishing is familiar, and easy.  
 Only, they don't catch a thing all night long!

The story opens at *daybreak* (another reminder of Easter starting at daybreak)  
 As the sun is coming up, they *see a man* on the shore,  
 suggesting that they throw their empty nets to the other side of the boat.

And just like Mary Magdalene,  
 they *don't recognize Jesus* until their nets are bursting with *153 fish!*  
 That number 153 is so large—some say it's symbolic,  
 But what if it's just a sign of God's *ABUNDANCE?*

Once they make the big catch, John says "*It is the Lord*",  
 and Peter jumps out of the boat to meet Jesus.

Which makes me wonder---*How do WE recognize Jesus* in our lives, today?  
 What does it *take to open* our eyes?

Here, Jesus does what he has done for them before--  
 He *feeds* them.  
*Come have breakfast*, he says.  
 Bring some of those fish you caught.

It's like what we celebrate today—*in communion*.  
 He's feeds them, like he *fed 5,000*, with five loaves and two fish.  
 Today, when we Celebrate the Lord's Supper,  
 we are also being fed by *Jesus*.

You know, many Christian traditions call this table an *altar*.  
 But in the Presbyterian tradition, we emphasize this as *the Lord's Table*.  
 We don't usually refer to this as an altar,  
 Because *Jesus' sacrifice was a once and for all* sacrifice.  
 That saved us, over 2000 years ago.

We call this the Lord's Table,  
 A place where we remember Jesus giving himself at his Last Supper,  
 AND the way he appeared to his followers after the resurrection,  
*Often around a Table*, or in the breaking of bread.  
 Like on the road to *Emmaus*, in the locked upper room,

and *on the shore* that day when they went fishing.

*The other part of this powerful story—*  
is *Jesus' interaction* with his beloved disciple, Simon Peter.

Remember Peter?

He is the *one who denied* knowing Jesus, three times.

Jesus predicted it would happen in John 13:38,

And it happens just as He said,

Peter denies knowing Jesus—three times—to three different groups of people—

Just as Jesus is being beaten and then sent to the cross!

*And here, Jesus sees Peter---* And doesn't condemn him!

Now think about that—*isn't that amazing?*

After eating breakfast,

*Jesus offers love and grace to Peter,*

by *asking him three times—Do you love me?*

He gives Peter three opportunities to affirm his love.

Just as Peter denied him, three times.

Jesus asks Peter *do you love me?*

And Peter says, Yes Lord.

So Jesus says *Feed my lambs.*

Jesus asks again, do you love me?

And Peter says, Yes, Lord,

So Jesus says, *Tend my sheep.*

But the third time Peter is *hurt* by Jesus' question,

*He responds, Lord you know that I love you.*

Then Jesus says *Feed my sheep.*

In reality, *Jesus loves Peter so much—*

That he gives him three opportunities to express his love.

This story reminds us, that we *don't have to get our lives right* for Jesus.

We may feel crazy, overloaded, emotional, or lost.

We may have messed up—royally.

*And still Jesus meets us—wherever we are.*

And Jesus offers *love, grace and forgiveness*.

A *second* chance.

This is Peter's second chance.

It's Jesus saying---the past is behind us,

You can forgive yourself, now (*how many of us need to hear that??*)

It's Jesus saying, I know you love me, now go and **SHOW that love**.

Be a shepherd to the people around you.

Our reading from the Book of *Acts* today

Is very similar.

It's about Saul, who was persecuting Christians,

*who becomes the apostle Paul* after an experience with Jesus

on the road to Damascus!

*It too is a story of second chances.*

*Of God's grace, and love.*

Just like Peter—*Jesus meets Saul right where he is.*

*And gives Saul a new calling—*

Instead of persecuting Christians,

he will bring people *to Christianity!*

The *Book of Acts* chronicles Paul's life-long journey,

Of founding churches, traveling, writing letters, and visiting believers.

At the end, *Jesus tells Peter that he will die* an untimely death,

Someone will take a belt and lead him where he doesn't want to go.

(*tradition tells us that Peter was later crucified upside down*)

*Paul too will be persecuted*, imprisoned, beaten, shipwrecked,

And struggle with an ongoing disability, which he called a 'thorn in his side'.

But, these believers *will not abandon* their faith,

*Because Jesus has faith in them!*

His love *helps them keep the faith*,

and *love* others, so they can *tend and feed* the sheep.

*What does all this mean for US today?*

What if it means that Jesus

*meets US, with love and grace, right where we are*, today?

That's the power of this story.  
*It doesn't matter who we are, or what we've done.*

Peter had denied knowing Jesus.  
 Saul had been killing Christians.  
 And still Jesus meets them with love and grace.

He offers them both a *second chance*,  
 The opportunity to start over,  
 To not just receive love,  
 But to *share love* with others,  
 By *tending and feeding the 'sheep'*—the people around them.

And the truth is,  
*WE all have 'sheep' around us that need our care, and love.*

It's *NOT enough to JUST SAY we love Jesus*, is it?  
 It's *not enough to just BELIEVE* in Him, right?  
 Jesus wants us to *put our faith in action*.

We are called to *live out our love*—  
 by loving, serving and caring for others.

This is *what it means to follow Jesus*.  
*When Jesus says to Peter, Follow Me*—  
 he is calling him to that new way of life.  
*Just like we* are called to a new way of life.  
 A life of *service*.

What does a *life of service* mean to you?

At St. Bede's Episcopal Church in Santa Fe, New Mexico,  
 there is a sign that *hangs over the door into the sanctuary*.  
 It says: **SERVANT'S ENTRANCE**.  
 There isn't any way in or out of that church except through that door.  
 Christianity Today, Vol. 35, no. 10.  
 But isn't that a perfect sign?  
 Isn't that our calling—to be *servants*?

Writer Philip Yancey notes that toward the end of his life,  
*Albert Einstein* removed the portraits of two *scientists*—

Newton and Maxwell--from his wall.  
He replaced them with *portraits of Gandhi and Albert Schweitzer*.  
Einstein explained that it was time to  
replace the image of success, *with the image of SERVICE*.  
Leadership, Vol. 16, no. 4.

So, what does it *mean to you*---that Jesus *loves and accepts* you, right now?  
That He offers you a second chance?  
And how can we put the love he gives—into action?  
*How can we serve?*

*Jesus still asks us ---Do you love me?*  
And if we do--- we are called to put that *love in action*.  
And follow Him.

Friends, that is the *Good News* of the Gospel today:  
Jesus *loves us, meets* us where we are,  
Offers us grace *no matter who* we are or what we've done.  
And then gives us a *whole new way of life*.  
And for this grace, all God's people can say together, Amen.