



John 21:7–14

7 Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord!’ As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, ‘It is the Lord,’ he wrapped his outer garment round him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. 8 The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred metres. 9 When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

10 Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish you have just caught.' 11 So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' None of the disciples dared ask him, 'Who are you?' They knew it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. 14 This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Reflection

At the start of Acts, Luke, the doctor turned

historian, writes that the resurrected Jesus appeared to his disciples over a period of forty days, speaking to them about the kingdom of God, before ascending into heaven. In John 21, as John brings his gospel to its conclusion, these eyewitness accounts of the resurrected Jesus continue.

At the end of chapter 20, John revealed to us his purpose in writing his gospel. He wrote that,

[we] may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing ... have life in his name.

And John concludes his gospel with a final eyewitness account of Jesus sending his disciples out on mission to the world.

As I read yesterday and today's passage for us now, listen to the incidental details included in John's narrative, so foreign in fictional accounts and yet so at home in the memory of an eyewitness. Right to the end John writes 'that we might believe.' Reading from John 21:1–14,

21 Afterwards Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: 2 Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. 3 'I'm going out to fish,' Simon Peter told them, and they said, 'We'll go with you.' So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. 4 Early in the morn-

ing, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realise that it was Jesus. 5 He called out to them, 'Friends, haven't you any fish?' 'No,' they answered. 6 He said, 'Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.' When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. 7 Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, 'It is the Lord,' he wrapped his outer garment round him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. 8 The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred metres. 9 When they landed, they

saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. 10 Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish you have just caught.' 11 So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' None of the disciples dared ask him, 'Who are you?' They knew it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. 14 This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

The eyewitnesses are named, numbered and listed; nets moved from the left side of

the boat to the right; the exact number of fish – 153 – burned into John’s astonished memory, not ‘nets teeming’ or another polished literary turn of phrase but ‘153 large fish’ recollected and retold; Peter inexplicably putting his cloak back on (having taken it off) before jumping into the water; the boat about 100 metres from shore; a fire not of wood but of burning coals. All of these unnecessary details drawn from the memory of an eyewitness, not the fantasies of a story teller; further incidental proof from John ‘that we might believe’.

And what a way to end his gospel! If Thomas’ exclamation ‘My Lord and my God’ and John’s purpose statement at the end of chapter 20 represent the climax of the gospel, then John’s final recollection of the life of Jesus in chapter 21 brings mem-

orable closure to Jesus' relationship with his disciples as well as reorientating them and us towards mission on earth. And so here we have relationship and mission; the heart and purpose of the Christian church.

First, mission. As we read this story how can we not recall the moment in each of the other three gospels when these fishermen were called by Jesus? Another great haul, nets breaking, two boats sinking (Luke 5) and these words from Jesus,

19 'Come, follow me,' Jesus said,
'and I will make you fishers of men'
Matt 4:19

Without Jesus, nothing (John 15:5). With Jesus, a staggering catch, 153 fish. Surely a parable of what is to come. And then

in Monday's passage to follow, 'Feed my lambs', 'Take care of my sheep', 'Feed my sheep', says the good shepherd to his under-shepherds. Mission. Matthew, Mark and Luke end with the Great Commission. John's version is more symbolic but no less missional, even as he continues to impress upon us the bodily resurrection of Jesus, 'that we might believe.'

Then secondly, relationship. This passage in its rich symbolism also vividly illustrates our communion with Jesus. Before his death, Jesus washed his disciples' feet. After his resurrection he is still caring for their needs, not only filling their nets with abundant blessing, but cooking them breakfast on the shore after their rough night at sea. Verse 12,

Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast.’

Renewed relationship, fellowship and provision. Jesus had promised that after a ‘little while’ he would come back and be with them (John 16:16–22) but this new relationship, they are learning, cannot be on the same terms as before. But it is nonetheless real and satisfying; and indeed it is part of the ‘better’ thing that the Holy Spirit will shortly bring at his coming at Pentecost. In the person of the Holy Spirit the ascended Jesus will come and make his home among them (John 14:23), they will not be abandoned like orphans (John 14:18) but will experience new depths of personal relationship with Jesus through the work of the Holy Spirit who will mediate Jesus’ presence into their lives as

they continue his mission on earth. And so if the haul of fish is a parable for mission, then the meal is also symbolic of this new and lasting relationship, the same as before but also very different and better by far.

Finally, this shared meal must take us back to the Last Supper, in the Upper Room. Bread and wine then, bread and fish now. This is my body broken for you, now resurrected and returning to glory. Do this in remembrance of me as you take the good news of the gospel out into the world.

And with symbolism like this, so favoured by John, it's no wonder that the symbol of the fish would shortly come to represent Christianity. So powerful, in fact, is the symbolism that two thousand years later

the fish symbol is still commonly seen on car windows identifying the occupants as proud followers of Christ.

Think

The disciples' mission is our mission just as their intimate relationship with the risen Lord Jesus is ours through the Holy Spirit who was poured out on all believers at Pentecost. Meditate today over Jesus' commission to us. Where are you casting your nets? Are your best efforts and best years being spent in futility? Is it time for an about-face?

Or perhaps you are going about your Christian life in your own strength, working through the night with great effort and to no avail. In John 15, the vine and the

branches, Jesus reminded us over and over that without him we can do nothing. But with him, 153 fish, an abundant harvest, great blessing, intimate provision and relationship.

Pray

Why not ...

‘Come and have breakfast’

... with Jesus this morning in prayer? Ask him today for your daily bread. He will provide. Ask him for help in carrying on his mission. He'll let you know where to cast your net. And experience the richness and satisfaction of deep and enduring relationship with him by the power of the Holy Spirit whom he sent to us for exactly

these reasons: provision for the ones he loves, mission to a dying world and personal relationship with our living God. In his name we pray. Amen.