

Follow Me!

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Scripture: John 21:1-19

¹ After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. ² Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. ³ 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.

⁴ Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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 off.

⁹ When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." ¹¹ 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. ¹² 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. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

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." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ 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." ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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." ¹⁹ (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

Have you ever told someone something and they seemed to have understood but either didn't or didn't want to do it as well as did not do it?

Have you ever taught someone something for not only a few days, months or a year, but for years, and once you leave their sight or they are on their own for a while, they seem not to remember what you felt like you ingrained in them?

In certain gospels, we are told how frustrated Jesus was with his disciple. I could tell you of all those instances, but just take a peek at the gospel of Mark when you feel like it and you'll see what I'm talking about. It wasn't all the time, but there were times when Jesus did rebuke the 11 disciples for not believing the women who included Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome who were the first to see Jesus after he rose from the dead (Matthew 28:8-11 & Mark 16:1-7).

Then there are times of great compassion and grace for even those who were very stubborn as we heard last week about Thomas who doubted that Jesus was raised from the dead unless he could more than just see Jesus but also touch the nail marks in his hands as well as the spear wound in Jesus' side.

And today, we look at how Jesus treats these 7 disciples as they totally forget or choose not to follow what Jesus told them to do. If you carefully read when Jesus was stern, direct, even a bit angry and but more frustrated, you'll understand why and for what purpose. As well, we can learn when he was gentle yet firm.

As we talked about last week about the effects of grief and trauma, and the disciples experienced in Jesus suffering, dying, and rising from the dead, we see more of how each person and even groups react in different and various ways.

Among the various reactions to feeling as if things are over in seeing Jesus before included them forgetting why in the world Jesus came to earth and that it was for heaven's sake Jesus rose from the dead so others could be saved.

They just didn't fully get it, and to be honest, who could blame them. Even we today have never seen someone die, be dead for three days and decaying in a tomb, and then come back to life. It would be hard to accept. Just look at various things in the world today and what people believe and do not believe. There are some who believe the earth is flat. I actually did some research on why they believe that. And no matter what evidence they are given, they will not believe it and come up with all sorts of reasons why the earth is flat, including everyone else lying to them. Astronaut Scott Kelly, who happens to have a twin brother who is also an astronaut, traveled into space and saw with their own eyes that the earth is round, not only knowing it from basic science such as traversing the seas and air around the world, said in a radio interview about his book, *Endurance*, that when people accuse him that the entire traveling to space and landing on the moon were and continue to all be a hoax, among the

various answers he gives, including why would countries spend so much money and time on such a hoax if the earth was truly flat, that if the earth was truly flat, then the edges of the world would be the most visited places of all time. Forget the 7 Wonders of the World, there would be only 1, the edge of the world.

I mean, if the earth was truly flat, then the edges would be the most popular places for such things as bungee jumping. Could you imagine bungee jumping without fear of hitting anything, only that if you go far enough that you'd maybe run out of oxygen, but that would be about 5 miles according to our planet now. Wow!

Sadly, some even when they prove themselves wrong, such as some people who believe the earth is flat and from using science experiments that most anyone can do with the right equipment discover that the measurements actually show the earth is round, including very expensive ways, such as a \$20,000 laser gyroscope that they say if they had would prove that they were right in saying the earth was flat by showing that the earth doesn't actual rotate. However, when they turned it on, they found there was a 15-degree per hour drift which they responded, "That's kind of a problem." (<https://www.triplem.com.au/story/flat-earthers-spend-20-000-trying-to-prove-earth-is-flat-accidentally-prove-its-round-129953>)

What did they do with the results that stunned them? They weren't willing to accept it and instead said that they would keep their findings confidential.

How sad that when they actually have proven themselves wrong that they wouldn't want to face the truth and then tell everyone of their followers who are die-hard flat earthers so they would no longer believe such lie that has not only caused them so much trouble in spending so much time and money trying to convince others, but they have gone so far to reject their family and friends who won't believe them. And it's all based on lies that some people decided was truth.

Bear with me as I connect this Jesus and his disciples and all who would eventually see him, that included so many and at one point a crowd of over 500 people.

Like Thomas did at first, until he touched Jesus, many would have a hard time believing or understanding.

Right before Jesus ascended to heaven, and that was after all Jesus said to them, including the event we are revisiting today with Jesus meeting them while they were fishing, they asked Jesus if he was going to restore the kingdom of God at that moment. They thought that the Great Commission of going and making disciples, being fisher of people, was over when it has just began and Jesus was going to leave them while they waited for the Holy Spirit to give them the power to do what they were supposed to do.

Sometimes it takes reinforcement after reinforcement of what we need to hear, believe and then act upon.

Just like I started with asking if you remember times when you've told someone something and they later act like you never said a word to them or after months and even years of teaching and preparing someone that once they are on their own that they somehow forget what you said and taught them.

But let us all be very honest with ourselves. When it came to certain things, such as driving a car, raising a dog, working at your first job, maybe even cutting the lawn for the first time, or starting a fire, and bigger ones such as raising children, we may have seen it, been around it, been taught about it, but until we actually do it ourselves do we learn with trial and error sometimes, with mistakes, frustrations, and even people telling you what to do when you say you know but are learning. Or better yet, a parent smiling and saying something like, now you really know. Of course, said with love.

So as harsh as I might be sounding towards the disciples, who after seeing Jesus and knowing what he taught them for some 3 years, and explaining again what they were to do, what happened?

Peter, who was Jesus' right hand man, who Jesus basically said to "here are the keys the church," said at this point, and I quote "I'm going fishing."

Now those words are music to my ears, as most of you know. I love fishing! But what was Peter thinking?

You can see he was still confused about what he was supposed to do. And who could blame him? When Jesus was always around, Peter took cues and learned and followed Jesus. And just like Peter, the other 6 disciples were sitting around wondering what to do. Their response to Peter was to do as they did with Jesus, follow. They simply said, "We'll go with you."

Even though evidence was given to them by Jesus himself, they could not seem to fully accept it or fully understand what it was for them to do. They may have thought it was all over and Jesus was going to stay and bring about the coming of Kingdom of God! That makes sense. He died, rose again, and will reign and make all things right.

So Jesus was gentle with them. I partly understand why. I cannot fully know, but I venture to say that Jesus knew they'd be shocked again when he said goodbye for a second time when he literally floated up to heaven. They stood as Jesus said that he'd be back sometime but didn't know when as he ascended into the skies until they couldn't see him anymore. We'll take a closer look at that in next week's message.

Among the various ways to teach something that you feel should have been understood, that actually was done before but for some reason abandoned, is to approach with care, over a meal if possible, and with a genuine expression of care.

We know Peter was all excited to see Jesus again. Peter was ready to continue to follow when Jesus was there. However, Jesus was preparing Peter as he needed to follow Jesus when Jesus was not around.

This all set the stage, including the miraculous catch of fish, to the point at which Jesus asks Peter three times if Peter loved him.

And after each time Peter said he did love Jesus, Jesus responded with saying, “Feed my lambs,” “Tend my sheep” and “Feed my sheep.”

We know lambs are sheep that are in its first year in life. Jesus tells Peter that expressing love is to watch over the sheep Jesus left Peter to tend, the little ones to the older ones, by feeding and taking care of them.

Peter was frustrated in having to repeat it three times. Some of you are thinking right now that it was to match the times that Peter denied Jesus three times before the rooster crowed.

I believe it was also to help Peter remember though not only recalling denying Jesus three times but with the strong feelings that we know Peter would often have, which at that point Peter was embarrassed a bit, felt like a child as Jesus called them children from shore, and all the feelings of children who may get mad at their parents for telling them for the umpteenth time to do something because they feel like they don't need to be told when in fact from previous experiences they easily forget.

We are like children when it comes to life, even as adults. Just look around the world at what people may believe, even when it's a total lie and they even are shown the truth but reject it for one reason or another, like people who passionately argue and spend time, money, and their lives trying to prove or at least convince more people that the world is flat, including those who know the truth and still hide it for the wrong reasons.

Peter had to stop lying to himself that he loved Jesus when he really didn't love Jesus fully. Peter had to own up to the fact that when all was said and done, he'd rather just go fishing and back to being a fisherman. Peter also led the other disciples who were just as lost as he was to go back and go fishing when in fact Jesus had just died and rose again so they would do the ministry that he called them to when Jesus first met and called them to follow him. He told them that they would no longer fish for fish but be fishers of...yes, you know. They knew. But they forgot.

And Jesus knew it. Jesus approached it as they needed. I'd like to think the disciples who kept their mouths shut and didn't ask what they wanted, but were sure it was Jesus, and did not do what would be tempting to do just to make sure. We are told in these verses for today that they didn't dare ask who he was. But that's our human nature.

It reminded me of a time when I was playing basketball at a park in Troy, and there was a buzz around the outdoor courts. And someone with massive muscles, and thighs, each bigger than my entire waist was running and jumping and playing like a beast. And I asked who that was. Someone said he was Barry Sanders. And my brother said it was since he had run into Barry who simply said hi to them when they said "Hi Barry" at the local grocery store. Well, for some reason I did what ended up being a foolish thing. I went up to him when he was taking a little break and asked him, "Are you Barry Sanders?" For some reason he wasn't in the mood for such a question or attention, and later I understood when it came to famous people. Sometimes they just want to be like everyone else and be left alone to live in peace and quiet. His answer to me? He said, "No. Whoever told you that is lying."

My friends who happened to see the interaction were all saying to me later that I shouldn't have offended him by asking him, since everyone else in the park knew it was him. I realized I did offend him and it taught me a very good lesson when later in life I did cross paths with some famous people, both times a movie theaters where I let them have a peaceful and unassuming evening without me saying hi or asking for autographs. They were having a time out, yes in public, to be and do as typical people. I know this might sound a bit silly, but try to see that our human nature is question sometimes, even that which is true and right in front of us. And then at times act like we are all good and with it when we are not.

Jesus did not let Peter slide with that attitude or perspective. Gentle yet still firm, Jesus teaches Peter in terms that Peter would understand and remember better. Jesus also knew they'd all really get it once the Holy Spirit would arrive. And Jesus told them that God's Holy Spirit would remind them of everything he had said to them, as well as guide them in following him.

So for us, do we truly believe or say that we do most of the times?

Do we say we love Jesus, but forget that means taking care of the young and older, to care for those God has put into our care or in our grazing fields of you want to say?

Do we truly believe what Jesus says and practice it until it becomes the new and lasting habit, overcoming default habits that we fall back on when we're stressed, confused, frustrated, and as it seemed Peter and disciples were, bored.

There is a time for everything. Yet, there's a time to always be doing this one thing. And Jesus says it passionately since it's written not with a period but an exclamation mark. Jesus said to Peter "Follow me!"

As if to emphasize and meet Peter where he is in his confusion, frustration, anger, as well as embarrassment. It's as if Jesus was saying to Peter, if you believe in who I am, get all excited about who I am, break bread with me, and say you love me, then show it! Actually follow me! Don't go back to what I called you from 3 years ago. Come on! I'm sending you to do the most important thing I could task anyone with. You're the one who is going to lead this for me. If you're going to say uh huh, yes, okay, I get it, and even get frustrated when I ask you to make sure, then show me by actually following me!

As Jesus is gentle with us, understanding of our questions, fears, doubts, and even words of saying how we will love Jesus, Jesus is asking all of his disciples, including Jesus asking you and asking me, “Do you love me?” And as we think of our ways in answering to say and try to prove we do. Let us remember, just as Jesus said how we build our houses on the rock when we do what he says, and where we are told that faith is dead without accompanying actions, so too does our love for Jesus become real when we do as he calls us to do. And that is to listen to and obey his loving call and command to follow him.

During these days, during these times, during all that we’re going through, one question to answer to help guide you, to help inspire you, to help renew you, to help encourage and embolden you, as well as to reignite the passion for the love of God and others is to remember Jesus saying with such passion for the sake of the souls of others, “Follow me!”

Then you will find more meaning, peace, security, courage, patience, kindness, understanding, empathy, and all that goes into love, the love of God. Focusing on following Jesus in every way possible, in every area of your life, and in these times will help you not only weather these storms better but also allow you to help those who are not safe on shore yet, who are drifting and in need of the call of Jesus to follow him too.

Know that when you follow Jesus each and every day, daily taking up his cross, then you will by the very nature of following Jesus, help lead others to him too. Just as you can easily lead others to follow the wrong ideas, the wrong ways of thinking, and even absolute lies, so are we more than able to help guide people to the Way, Truth and Life, who is Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Listen to Jesus, and with all that he taught and said, remember today and each day, especially when you feel lost, hopeless, and helpless, saying to you, “Follow Me!” Amen.