

Many Convincing Proofs Part 2

I said last Sunday we would look again today at the post resurrection appearance of Jesus in John 21. If you remember, I quoted last Sunday from Acts 1, that after Jesus' death and resurrection, Luke said **"...he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive."** **Acts 1:3** Part of the convincing proof involved the events found in John 21 so turn there again if you would. If I was going to divide John 21 into two parts, I would probably call the first part Breakfast with Jesus. We talked about it last Sunday as Peter returned to fishing and then after catching nothing all night long, Jesus gave them advice that led to filling their nets with fish. Jesus then treated them to a breakfast he had prepared for them after their long night on the Sea of Galilee. John writes **"This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead."** **John 21:14** I mention that because I want to make sure you understand the significance of these convincing proofs that Jesus was alive. This wasn't some kind of apparition where he appears, dreamlike, ghostlike, floating above the ground with a mystical voice. He is on the shore cooking breakfast, handing them plates of bread and fish. He was alive and spending time with them. I don't think ghosts cook breakfast and then eat with people. I just want to make that clear.

If the first part of John 21 is Breakfast with Jesus, the next part of John 21 I would call Unfinished Business. In order to understand, you need a little background. You know how on television programs they say, "Previously on NCIS" or whatever the program and then they show you a bunch of background clips to refresh your memory and bring you up to date? I wish I could do that, but since I can't, you'll have to use your imagination. Previously on breakfast with Jesus... then imagine the scene from John 13, at the last supper, when Peter says to Jesus, **"I will lay down my life for you."** And Jesus said, **"Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times."** **John 13:37-38**

Then cut to the scene described in Luke 22. Jesus has been arrested and they are now in the courtyard of the high priest's house. Peter is trying to hide in plain sight to see what happens. He is warming himself near a fire in the courtyard when a servant girl spots him and says to those standing around, "This man was with him" and Peter says, "Woman, I don't know him." And again someone points to Peter and says "You are one of them" and he denies being with Jesus and then a third time, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean" and Peter swore an oath and said "By all that's holy, I don't know what you are talking about." Imagine if

we could see the image Luke records, after this third denial. Jesus was in the courtyard and heard Peter's denial. **“The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him, ‘Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.’ And he went outside and wept bitterly.” Luke 22:61-62**

Of course then there would be five minutes of commercials and then we come back to the present day and John 21. The disciples had been told to return to the area of the Galilee and to wait for Jesus there. Tired of waiting, the scene opens with Peter and six of the other disciples fishing (remember they were professional fisherman). They fished all night and caught nothing. A man they would discover to be Jesus called to them from the shore and told them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat and they would catch fish. They followed his instructions and caught so many fish they couldn't pull the net into the boat and had to tow it behind them as they made for shore. John says, “It's Jesus” and Peter immediately jumps out of the boat and heads for land. I said last week, you have to appreciate that about Peter, he was always eager to get to Jesus, always moving toward him. But this time, I wonder if he was having second thoughts as he made his way toward the Master.

As he swims, then runs and splashes toward the shoreline, I wonder what's going through his mind as he makes his way to Jesus? Maybe he's watching his own version of “previously on Breakfast with Jesus” replaying before his eyes. Surely he is thinking about the way it all began with Jesus because, what do you know, Jesus had just recreated the scene for him! As Yoggi Berra said, “it was deja vu all over again.”

Luke 5 tells the story from 3 ½ years earlier that might have been running through Peter's mind. A crowd had gathered to hear Jesus teach along the shore of Galilee. Possibly at this same spot (near Tabgha). Peter, James and John had been fishing all night and their nets were empty (hmmm...sounds familiar). They were cleaning their nets, preparing to put them away when Jesus climbed into the boat belonging to Peter and asked him to row out a little way from the shore, then Jesus sat down in the boat and taught the people so they could all hear and see him.

When he finished teaching he told Peter to “put out into the deep water and let down the nets for a catch.” (Again, just like John 21.) Peter told him they had fished all night and caught nothing, but at his word they would obey. Luke records, **“When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners**

in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.” Luke 5:6-7 (Like John 21- even James and John)

Peter’s response to this miraculous catch in Luke 5 was to fall to his knees and say to Jesus, **“Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!”** Jesus’ response to Peter was, **“Don’t be afraid; from now on you will catch men.”** Jesus was calling Peter (and his partners, James and John) to come follow him into a new life, to come with him and encounter the kingdom of God. Look at their sold out response: **“So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.” Luke 5:8-11**

They had left everything to follow Jesus and now they were back to fishing like before in John 21. Is that running through his mind as Peter makes his way through the waves to Jesus? It seemed so long ago in some ways, and in some ways like only yesterday. The first time Peter had said, “go away from me Lord, I am a sinful man.” Peter knew he was still a sinful man, he knew he had failed the Lord, but this time he knew to run to Jesus instead of run from him. He knew his only hope for forgiveness and a second chance was to run to him and not from him.

What he wouldn’t give for a second chance; a fresh start to follow Jesus again. Have you ever felt that way? If you could just begin again? I’m thinking Peter was having trouble getting the sound of that rooster crowing out of his head. Maybe that’s what caused Peter to jump out of the boat to begin with. “It’s just like the first time, the miraculous catch of fish, the nets full, a call to a new life. Maybe that’s why he is doing this. Jesus is giving me a second chance, a chance to start over, a new beginning. Another opportunity to choose to fish or follow Jesus. He’s giving me another chance to leave everything and follow him!”

As Peter comes splashing through the water, maybe he is remembering not only that previous miraculous catch, but he is remembering all that catch led to. Leaving his fishing business and following Jesus, the miracles, healing the sick, raising the dead, all of the amazing teaching, the sermon on the mount and the feeding of the 5,000. He remembers the moment at Caesarea Philippi when in response to Jesus’ question about who he really was, Peter said “You are the Christ, the Son of God.” He remembers the transfiguration on the mountain, Jesus in his glory, talking to Moses and Elijah. Such glorious moments, but then that horrible night and Peter’s failure, his denial of the Lord shoves those glorious memories to one side. It’s always that way with our failures isn’t it? The devil and our minds have a way of pushing our past and our failures to the forefront. How could God forgive someone like you? “Peter, how could Jesus

forgive you for denying him after all those boasts you made of laying down your life for him? I thought you said you would follow him even to death.”

Peter had wept bitterly that night, his heart broken by his failure. It wasn't as if Jesus had ignored him after the resurrection. In fact, the angels had mentioned Peter by name to the women at the tomb – “tell his disciples and Peter that Jesus will meet them in Galilee.” Jesus hadn't rebuked him when he appeared to the disciples in Jerusalem, but he had to be wondering what Jesus was thinking. Peter had promised to follow Jesus regardless, even to death, and when the pressure was on, he failed. Peter had to wonder if things would ever quite be the same between he and Jesus after his betrayal. “Maybe he still loves me, but he just doesn't exactly have a place for me in his plans for the future. Maybe you don't get a second chance. How could Jesus ever trust me again?”

All these thoughts are perhaps running through Peter's mind as he runs toward Jesus that morning on the Galilee. When he gets to shore he sees a fire of burning coals there with fish grilling on it and some bread. He must have swallowed hard when he saw the fire. “Oh, no, here it comes. I've been here before.”

King James calls it “a fire of coals.” It wasn't just made out of sticks or drift wood, it was made of coals, like a charcoal fire. The Greek word is *anthrakia* and it is only used twice in the New Testament. Guess where the other usage is found? John 18:18 - in Caiphas' courtyard. It was a charcoal fire, a fire of coals that Peter was warming himself by when he denied the Lord. It's as though Jesus has recreated scenes from Peter's calling with the miraculous catch and now he recreates the scene from Peter's denial in Caiphas' courtyard around that charcoal fire. All that was missing was a rooster crowing somewhere in the background. (“Cue the rooster.”)

Understand, Jesus wasn't doing this to harm Peter. This wasn't payback for denying him. This was grace to heal and restore him. Jesus recreated the scene so the place of Peter's greatest failure could become a place of healing, redemption and grace.

You see, Jesus could have left this whole matter unaddressed and Peter would still have served Jesus, but perhaps driven without joy, trying to make up for his failure, always wondering if Jesus really had forgiven him, wondering if he had done enough to make up for his mistake.

Peter could have gone on serving Jesus, but always wrestling with a past that haunted him, accusing him, feeling like he was a second-class disciple. Condemned every time he heard a rooster crow or every time he saw a charcoal fire. It wouldn't make for a healthy life or a

healthy faith.

Jesus wanted Peter to be healed, restored, made whole again. So he set him up for healing. Do you hear that? He set him up for healing, for restoration. I think Jesus has been setting some of you up for healing, positioning you for restoration. He doesn't want you living under that self-reproach and condemnation. He wants to make you whole.

Jesus brought him to this moment, to this seaside place and to another miraculous catch of fish to remind Peter of his first commitment to follow Jesus. And he brought him here, beside another charcoal fire to remind him of his greatest failure. And then he asks him the question:

“Simon, Son of John, do you truly love me more than these?” John 21:15

It's interesting that instead of calling him Peter, the name Jesus had given him when he first called him, he calls him by that formal name, Simon, Son of John, the name he had first known him by. I wonder if he is taking him all the way back to the beginning. “Peter, let's start over. Let's put the past few days behind us and let's start fresh.” So after breakfast, Jesus says, “Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these?” We don't know for sure to what Jesus was referring. More than these - things? As I suggested last Sunday, perhaps Jesus is asking “do you love me more than fishing and boats and the sea? More than this old life?” Or perhaps he is asking, “Do you love me more than these other men?” Remember, before Jesus' arrest and crucifixion Peter had boasted, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.” Matthew 26:33. “Do you truly love me more than all of these other disciples?” More than the old life? More than fishing? More than life itself? More than anything and everything? Regardless of what Jesus was referring to, Peter affirms, **“Yes Lord, you know that I love you.” John 21:16**

Three times Jesus asks the question with only slight differences, “Peter, do you love me?” Each time Peter affirms his love for Jesus. Preachers and scholars have looked for deeper meaning in the particular words Jesus chose – suggesting he wanted Peter to acknowledge a deeper love and commitment - *agape* versus *phileo* in the Greek translation. The problem is if Jesus and Peter were speaking Aramaic, those subtle differences in the words weren't necessarily there. At the core of it, I think the significance is found in the fact he asked him three times if he loved him. Once for each denial.

Three times Peter denied him on that night of betrayal. Three times Jesus speaks into Peter's pain and guilt and gives him the opportunity to affirm his love, his commitment. Three

times Peter says “You know I love you” and three times Jesus affirms his forgiveness and his restitution of Peter. Three times Jesus says in essence “then what are you doing out here catching fish when I’ve got work for you to do.” He changes his metaphor from fishing to shepherding. “Peter, you are forgiven. Forget the past and get busy. Feed my lambs, take care of my sheep, watch over my flock.”

Jesus meets Peter at his place of failure to tell him he is forgiven, that his calling remains, that there is work to be done. Listen to me, there is healing and restoration in Jesus. Twice in the verses that follow, Jesus says to Peter, “Follow me. It may not be easy, but follow me. Follow me and you will glorify God with your life and even in your death. Are you willing to follow me?” When Peter asks, “What about John? What’s going to happen to him? What’s required of him?” Jesus says basically, “What is that to you?” Then he tells him, “**You must follow me.**” **John 21:22** Listen, that’s his word to us today. We must follow Jesus! Regardless of what the future holds for us or others, regardless of pandemics, regardless of who lives or dies, regardless of who serves the Lord or who falls away, we must follow Jesus!

Forgiven. Restored. Healed. Affirmed. Called. Commissioned. Once again determined to answer the call to follow Jesus! I think the next time Peter saw a charcoal fire instead of remembering his failure, I think he celebrated God’s grace. I think the next time he saw a net full of fish, he remembered Jesus’ restoration and a second chance. I think the next time he heard a rooster crow, he rejoiced that Jesus still loved him, in spite of it all. Jesus still had a place and purpose for Peter. Loved and forgiven, restored and called.

We’re all a lot like Peter aren’t we? We’ve all sinned and missed the mark. We’ve all failed. We’ve all denied Jesus by our words, our actions, our choices. We’ve all betrayed him and sinned against him at some point. We’ve all been afraid to face the truth about ourselves and our failure.

Jesus invites us to come to our own charcoal fire today. Not to wound or hurt us, but to heal and deliver us. He invites us to come to a place of forgiveness and healing and mercy and grace. He invites us to come like Peter and face our failure, our denial of him, our mistakes, to admit we’ve betrayed him and sinned against him and then to repent and ask for his forgiveness. And do you know what? He will forgive us and restore us just as he did Peter! “But you don’t know what all I’ve done. You don’t know how many times I’ve failed him.” I don’t but Jesus does and he still invites you to come, just as he did Peter. He’s prepared a meal for you too, like

Peter and he invites you to come and eat with him and fellowship with him and live for him.

I said at the beginning of this year I felt like it was time for people to come home to Carbondale. People that used to attend here, that grew up here but they stopped attending church, life got in the way, maybe you are one of those people. You just kind of drifted away. Maybe you stopped serving the Lord, maybe something happened, a failure, a mistake you made and you've felt so guilty, so condemned by your past and you felt like you just couldn't ever come home. Too much time has passed, too many mistakes, too much water under the bridge as the saying goes. And what do you know, Jesus has prepared a way for you to come home to him and come home to Carbondale without even having to leave your living room. Right there, today, you can come home, and what I'm really talking about is not coming home to a church, but coming home to a Savior, come home to a renewed relationship with Jesus. Come home to him because he has set you up for healing, for restoration. He still has a place and purpose for you in his kingdom, in his church. It's not too late!

Years ago I heard Dr. Mark Rutland tell about a poll that was supposedly taken that suggested the three most desired phrases we want to hear are: **I love you. I forgive you. Supper's ready.** I think that's what Jesus said to Peter. "I love you. I forgive you. Supper's ready. Let's eat and then let's get to work." Can you hear Jesus saying that to you today? I love you. I forgive you. Suppers ready.

If you've been living in guilt and condemnation and shame over your sin, your past, your mistakes. Ask Jesus to forgive and cleanse you. Repent and turn to him. Come home to Jesus. Come home to his church, his family. And then hear his words of love and forgiveness and restoration. There is a second chance for you, just like there was for Peter. There is healing and grace enough for all the mistakes and sins of your past. Come as you are to Jesus. He loves you. He'll forgive you. He has supper ready for you. Let's pray.

Thanks for joining us today. Don't forget the celebration for our high school seniors tonight at 6:00. Stay connected with us and with each other.

"May the Lord bless you and keep you, May the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord lift up his countenance upon and give you peace."