

Be Fed- Feed and Follow: the Restored Disciple

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[0 : 0 0] Well, here we are. If this is your first Sunday with us, well, it is our last Sunday as a church in John's Gospel. We're starting something new next week, I promise. But this is a significant Sunday because we as a church have spent the last year in this Gospel, but every good thing has to come to an end. Even John says that, doesn't he? If he had tried to write down everything that Jesus had done, well, the world would not be big enough to hold all the books. Isn't that a brilliant thought to finish with? That if we ourselves tried to say or sing or write everything that there was to say and sing and write about Jesus, that we'd never be finished. That Jesus is that good. Okay, a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million years into the new creation, and we still won't be scratching our heads wondering what to praise Jesus for today. That we will still be standing in awe of him, praising him, praising him, thanking him, overjoyed by him forever. And the whole reason that John wrote this Gospel for us was so that we would begin to respond to Jesus in that way now. We saw last week, didn't we? This is why he wrote it. These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the

Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name. We started this series with a wee phrase that I think got lost somewhere in the middle, but you can't miss it in this Gospel, and it's this, believing in Jesus is belonging to God. Believing in Jesus is belonging to God. That's what Jesus offers, life with God that starts now and lasts forever. So that's what this Gospel has been about, and now we're at the end. And if this was a film, okay, chapter 21 would be the scene just after the big battle, just after the climax, okay, the friends are back together, and they stand and ask each other, what now? What next? Well, there's still one thing left to do, says John, one loose thread of the story that still needs tying together, because if John had been a two-hour film and not a year-long preaching series, we would be wondering, wouldn't we, what happened to Peter? What happened to Peter? We know that he had run to the tomb the morning Jesus rose. We know, too, as we read earlier, that he had denied Jesus three times. So what about Peter? Well, we've seen Jesus meet longing disciples like Mary and doubting disciples like Thomas. But what about the disciple who denied him?

Well, says John, this is how it went. How does Jesus come to someone like Peter? Well, firstly, Jesus comes and says, be fed. Be fed. So it's evening on a beach. Okay, try to imagine yourself there sitting on the sand is a bit of a motley crew. See that in verse two there, Simon, Peter, Thomas, Nathaniel from Cana, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. This is a motley crew. Who are these guys that Peter had denied Jesus? Thomas had doubted Jesus. And do you remember Nathaniel? What did Nathaniel say about him? Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Can anything good come out of Nazareth? That was Nathaniel. And so these are guys with colorful histories with Jesus, aren't they? And yet by one by one, their doubt has turned to belief. Nathaniel came to confess, surely you are the son of God, the king of Israel. Thomas, we heard last week say, my Lord and my God.

They are there with the sons of Zebedee, James and John, the John who wrote this gospel and two other disciples. Now we don't know how long after the resurrection it was that this happened, but there they are on the beach. And now Peter says, right, lads, back to work. I'm going fishing.

And the others say, we're going to. Now why do they decide to go fishing? They are fishers by trade, I guess. Perhaps are they thinking we just need to put food back on the table? We're going back to our nets. That's our Jesus days kind of finished. Back to the old days, maybe. Or whatever it was, it becomes clear as we go on. Their choice wasn't necessarily the right one. They have a completely pointless night fishing, don't they? They don't catch a thing. And it's right then that Jesus, risen from the dead, comes to speak to them. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples didn't realize it was him. And he calls out to them across the water to the boat, throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some. And when they did that, we read, their nets were filled straight away. Now think about that. Okay, for these guys, fishing wasn't a hobby. Okay, these were men who had grown up on boats, grown up mending nets and fixing sails and trawling the sea night and day. They had grown up gutting fish and descaling fish and deboning fish and selling fish. They are professionals and they have been fishing all night and they have not caught a thing. So then who is Jesus that he can stand on a beach 100 meters from the boat and tell them where the fish were to be found? How could he see what they had failed to see?

[6 : 38] Well, because he is no ordinary man. John tells us it was the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead. This is the risen and reigning Lord of creation.

You're in the same way. If you notice this, when they get back to the beach, well, what is waiting for them on the shore? Verse 9. What do you see? When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it and bread. Now Jesus hasn't been fishing and their fish is still in the nets and yet there are fish on the fire. How? Well, because he is Lord and he is God. He has divine knowledge, divine power over the created order. And so here's the question then. Here's the question. If you knew him, the one who was risen from the dead and reigns over everything with perfect power and wisdom, in fact, if you had seen him twice risen from the dead now and he had sent you into the world to offer forgiveness of sins to the world in his name, why on earth would you ever go back to fishing?

Do these guys not know who it is that they are dealing with? Do they not know that Jesus could more than provide for them in his mission to the world? They've spent a fruitless night fishing on the lake and then Jesus speaks a word and their nets are heaving. In fact, they were unable, says John, to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. They've gone from famine to feast.

And the difference is not their skill. It is the presence and power of the risen Lord Jesus. So why were they desperately trying to feed themselves night and day when they knew the one who could feed them with a word? You came only to get your fill of the loaves, Jesus said to another crowd, but do not work for food that doesn't last, but for food that lasts to eternal life. What food, they ask? I am the bread of life, he said. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. He is the one who all the way along has told us, hasn't he? That he is the one who feeds us. Now, that's not to say that we don't need to go to work and provide for ourselves and our families, but over and over in this gospel, John has used Jesus' interactions with physical food to teach us about being spiritually fed. And again and again, we've seen this is the only one who can satisfy our hearts, feed us full, cause living water to spring up in our souls. Why work for food that spoils as if our lives depended on it when he comes to give life full and free and free and without price? That's the lesson, says John, that we apostles still struggle to learn, even at the very end. And so I don't know if Jesus had a favorite dish to cook, but what he chose to cook that morning was fish, barbecued fish, stone-baked bread. It must have tasted divine. And if we've ever wondered whether we should enjoy eating, enjoy food, perhaps we need to memorize John 21 verse 12,

Jesus said to them, come and have breakfast. Food is good. But friends, the reason that he cooks for these men that morning is because they had forgotten who it was that feeds them.

[10 : 52] It didn't take them very long, did it, to forget. And how much easier then for us to forget, not two weeks or two months, but 2,000 years after Jesus has raised from the dead, that Jesus is the bread of life. How quickly do we forget that our hunger and thirst in life is satisfied only in him, by him? When Jesus sends us out with the good news of forgiveness of sins, he doesn't send us out empty-handed. We're not working on commission.

He gives us all that we need to live and speak faithfully for him each and every day. That includes physical provision. Do not worry, he said, saying, what shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we wear?

Your heavenly Father knows that you need these things, but seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Friends, seeing Jesus' control over the created order here, infinitely greater than any simply human farmer or fisher, well, why would we doubt his promise to provide everything that we need to live for him in this world? And it includes, of course, spiritual feeding to come and eat freely of the bread of life, he said. Come and drink living water. Your soul need never go hungry or thirsty again. There will never be a day that we will come to Jesus and he will say, I have run out. He will never be out of stock. We can come to him each and every day, multiple times a day for the rest of our lives, as many as come to him, and he will give life.

He is the same risen and reigning Lord today as he was on that beach. And so, friends, do not go into tomorrow thinking Sunday was great, but now back to the grind. Now time for me to put food on my table.

Whatever is on your agenda tomorrow, live and work for the king. Come to him and be fed, and he will feed you full. Come and be fed by Christ. And then Jesus tells Peter, don't only be fed, but feed. Our second point, feed. Now there's a bit going on here that we didn't really get into there.

[13 : 42] It's a bit of a kind of classic Bible story, isn't it? Peter jumping out of the boat. So much so, we can kind of miss what we actually read. Have we read this? Because it's actually really quite odd.

Okay, just stepping back a minute from the text, let me ask you this. Last time you went swimming, how did you get ready? You went presumably to the pool, to the beach. You put all your clothes on, and then you got in the water, right? Well, no, you got undressed, and then you got in the water.

Okay, now read verse 7 with me. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, it is the Lord. As soon as Simon Peter heard him say it's the Lord, he wrapped his outer garment around him, for he had taken it off and jumped into the water. Peter gets dressed and then literally throws himself into the sea. Now, is that a normal way to go swimming? I hope it's not. With your long robe on, I hope none of you have ever gone swimming like that. Now, normally what we think is going on here is that Peter is so excited that Jesus is on the beach that he jumps into the water and swims ahead to meet him. But all it says is that he put on his outer garment and threw himself into the sea.

The NIV says the others followed him. Literally, the Greek says the others came in the boat. So, okay, you say that's details, but hang on a minute. If Peter's so excited to meet Jesus, why is it so awkward when he gets there? Notice that Jesus gives instructions. None of the others say anything. None of the disciples dared ask him, who are you? They eat in silence. Does it seem to you that Peter is excited to see Jesus? In fact, Peter has been caught out, hasn't he? He's gone back to his nets. You could say that he's running away from his calling to hold out the good news of Christ Christ to the world. And now think, okay, who else do we know who ran away from his calling and got on a boat and went to sea and ended up in the sea? Does that remind you of anyone else in the Bible? Does it not remind you of Jonah? Friends, throw me into the sea is what Jonah said when he was thrown off the boat, running away from God. Is it not possible that Peter feels a bit like Jonah did when he hears that the Lord is waiting for him on the beach?

As if there might be some unresolved tension or some friction between them that Peter might not want to deal with? Okay, add to that, this is not the first time that Jesus has done this.

[16 : 51] Is it back in Luke chapter 5, Jesus does this? The disciples had been out fishing. They'd caught nothing. Jesus came to them on the boat, said, throw your nets on this side. They caught a massive fish.

And what did Peter say? I'm so glad you're here, Lord. No, he said, depart from me, for I am a sinful man.

I'm not worthy to be in your presence. So let me ask you this. How likely is it now, now that Peter has denied knowing Jesus three times and gone back to his boat, that Peter now feels really good about himself and is ready to meet Jesus on the beach? It seems to me not very likely.

More likely that he has thrown himself into the sea to avoid a chat. And if that seems improbable to you, it seems no obvious to me than the idea that Peter thought that he could swim 100 meters fully clothed faster than six men could row or sail a boat that distance. Okay, yes, Peter went to see the empty tomb.

Yes, he's seen him alive again twice, but all is still not right, is it, between him and Jesus?

[18 : 16] There is still an open wound, and Jesus brings it right out into the open, verse 15. When they'd finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?

It's a bit like coming home after a week away, and you get to the door, and your husband or your wife is waiting for you, and the first thing they say is, do you love me? You would know that something was up, wouldn't you? Not all is well. Jesus asks a second time, and a third time, do you love me? Something is definitely not right here. I mean, do you not even notice, what does Jesus call Peter? What does he call him?

Not Peter. Simon, son of John. Isn't that odd? It was Jesus who gave this man the name Peter when they first met. You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Peter. Now it's Simon, son of John again.

What is going on here? Now, it could sound a little bit cold, couldn't it? A bit like using somebody's middle name. But I think it's something else. Remember when we first met Peter?

Remember three years ago when we first met, and you were Simon, son of John? Jesus is taking him right back. He's stripping Peter right back down to the foundations of his faith, isn't he? Remember when we first met, and that's devastating for Peter, and yet it is life-giving.

[19 : 54] Why? Because Jesus is giving him a fresh start, isn't he? Jesus asks him three times if he loves him, three times the same number of times that Peter had denied knowing him. He is restoring him. He is wiping the slate clean again. And notice that it's Jesus doing that for Peter, not the other way around.

Jesus taking the initiative with Peter to put things right. So what happened to Peter in the end? Well, Jesus is not returning to the Father until this man is back in the fold.

It's a wonderful reminder, isn't it, that however far we have strayed from God, however many times that we have denied him in our hearts, in our minds, in our words, in our lives, well, his desire is to put our relationship with him back together. And he is willing to come to us to do that, to restore us to himself. So if that is you, do not let past wrongs, do not let ongoing sin or guilt or shame keep you from coming to him. Because he wants you right there. Do not run from him. Instead, do a 180.

Turn away from whatever is keeping you from him and run to him and confess your love for him afresh. He doesn't want anything less for you, brothers and sisters, than that. He wants you back in the fold.

And for Peter, it doesn't stop there, does it? He doesn't want him only in the fold, but over the flock. Notice that three times Peter says he loves him. Three times Jesus commissions him, feed my lambs.

[21 : 45] Take care of my sheep. Feed my sheep. His confession leads to his commission. He is to be a sheep and he is to be a shepherd. Now notice that there's still definitely Jesus's sheep and lambs, not Peter's.

But just as Peter was fed by Jesus, so now Peter is to feed Jesus' people. It's a great symbol of what the apostles were given to do, not replace Jesus, but feed his people what they themselves had been fed.

One commentator puts it like this, Jesus' concern in the post-resurrection age will be the feeding of his people through what he has fed his apostles. And what is that food? Well, the good news of forgiveness that he sends them out with. The good news of him. That's where we get our four gospels, the records of Jesus. We are fed, brothers and sisters, when we feast on the good news of Christ.

And as we feed, we ourselves are called to feed too, aren't we? You never underestimate how God might use you to feed others. Perhaps we think, surely not me? Well, was Peter a likely candidate to feed Christ's flock? Surely not. But when we turn to Jesus, we confess our love for him.

Do not rule yourself out of feeding his people, sharing the good news of him with others here, in your life group, or with new course mates, or colleagues, or friends, or neighbors. If you love him and you say that you love him, do not be surprised when he asks you to feed his flock. We must be ready and willing for that. Feed. And very finally, what does Jesus want for Peter now? Be fed, feed, and lastly, look, follow. Follow. Jesus says it twice, once at the end of verse 19, follow me. And then again, verse 22, you must follow me. It's pretty clear, isn't it, what he wants. Now, what does that mean for Peter?

[24 : 08] Peter? Well, it means following Jesus even to death. Verse 18, very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you dressed yourself and went where you wanted. But when you are old, you'll stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go. And he was talking about the way Peter was going to die, says John, in a way that would glorify God. And that way, he notices very similar to what happened to Jesus. Jesus, who was dressed in a purple robe, a crown of thorns. He was led where he, well, willed to go, but would not have gone were it not for human sin to die a death with his arms stretched out. Follow me to the cross, says Jesus. Follow me there to a painful and shameful death. And that's challenging, isn't it, for any of us, but especially for Peter, who, remember, the whole reason he denied Jesus was to spare himself that death as Jesus went to the cross. He didn't want to be identified with a crucified man. Well, now Jesus says he must be.

Saying we love him means following him wherever he leads. And he leads us to the cross. Now, some of you might be here because you are new to Aberdeen. You're finding your feet. You're finding a church family. That is wonderful. And we're really, really glad that you are here.

And one of the questions that's going to be especially important to you, if that is you, over the next couple of months is not only what kind of church am I looking for, but what kind of Christianity am I looking for? What kind of Christ do I follow?

Jesus says following him means denying ourselves, taking up the cross, and following him. Going where you don't want to go, he says, but going because you love him, and that is where he goes.

Because it is the way of the cross, friends, that brings glory to God, not the way of my comfort, and my convenience, and my pleasure. And so, friends, if that is you looking for a church, let me urge you to find a church where Christianity is cross-shaped, where following Jesus looks like following him all the way to death. For Peter, that is how his life ended. Tradition holds that he was crucified, but upside down, because he didn't consider himself worthy to die the same death as his Lord.

[26 : 59] What a change in a man who once would have run from a cross, now saying that even the cross is too good for him, because it is where Christ died. So, are we there yet? Brothers and sisters, have we followed Jesus long enough to know that we are not even worthy of sharing in a death like his?

We followed Jesus long enough to understand that it is a gift to suffer for the sake of his name. Would we be willing to die a shameful and painful death if it meant we were following him?

Peter wants to know if John is going to die that way too, while Jesus says, don't worry about him. Just you follow me. You follow me. If I want him to remain alive till I return, what's that to you?

You must follow me. As if he's saying, don't look over your shoulder. Keep your eyes front and center on me. Friends, are we there yet in our walk with Jesus?

Is he worth us giving our lives to follow him? Well, we'll finish where we started. If you're not sure, says John, if he is worthy, well, let me leave you with this thought, that the world is not enough.

[28 : 26] The world is not enough for him. He did many other things, and if every one of them were written down, I suppose even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

We could not say enough, sing enough, write enough, praise enough. We would run out of breath. We would run out of space. We would run out of breath.

We would run out of breath. We would run out of breath. Who he is and what he has done. There is no limit to the glory we could give him. And he would not be worthy of it.

And so is there ever too far we could follow. Is there ever a point where it is not worth us carrying on behind him?

Friends, there is not. He is worthy of our praise, our lives, our love. And so as we close this gospel today, let us not stop being fed.

[29 : 23] And let us not stop feeding. And let us not stop following our Lord, our God, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Let's pray together. God, our Father, how we praise ye and thank ye for sending your Son, the Lord Jesus, into the world.

We thank you. He came so willingly to die the death that we deserve for our sins and to be raised to new life. And Father, we pray as we turn our eyes to him, as we fix our hearts on him, that ye would fill us with fresh faith to follow him.

Father, we pray that ye, through him, would feed us as we go into this coming week. Father, we pray that whatever it holds, that ye would enable us to turn to him and have life to the full.

We thank ye that he is the bread of life and that we need never go hungry. So fill us, we pray, ready to follow him, whatever it costs. For this we ask in his name.

[30 : 38] Amen.