**SOME UNFINISHED BUSINESS IN GALILEE**

John 21:1-25

When I was a kid our family watched a TV show called “The FBI” starring Efrem Zimbalist Jr. Perhaps you remember it. The show was divided up into Acts 1, 2, 3, etc. At the end of each episode they had what they called the Epilogue in which they would tie up any loose ends. This morning as we finish up our study of the Gospel of John we’ll be in Ch 21, which is John’s epilogue. Our Lord appears once again to His disciples and wraps up some unfinished business He has with them. This is His 7th post-resurrection appearance overall (that we know of from scripture) and the 3rd to His disciples as a group. In the other appearances that Jesus made they were in or around Jerusalem. This one is in Galilee, home for most of His disciples. In Matthew’s gospel the disciples were told by an angel of the Lord that Jesus would meet them in Galilee (Matt 28:16). So shortly thereafter the disciples travel from Jerusalem back home to Galilee expecting to meet Jesus.

So that’s where we pick up the action, John 21 v 1…

READ John 21:1-14

The disciples are back in Galilee. They’re not sure where Jesus is going to meet them so more than likely they go down to Capernaum, which is on the Sea of Galilee. [V 1 refers to it as the Sea of Tiberias (the Roman name) but it is the same body of water.] Capernaum is the hometown of Peter and Andrew and James and John. It also served as Jesus’ home base during His Galilean ministry. So it makes the most sense that they would go there. Peter isn’t one to just sit around and do nothing so he says, “I’m going fishing.” Peter has a boat and nets. Fishing is what he did for a living before Jesus called him. Several of the other disciples say, in v 2, “We’ll go with you.” But these seasoned fishermen who know this body of water so well – they know where to fish – well, they caught NOTHING. Out all night on the Sea of Galilee and they didn’t catch a thing. So now it’s daybreak. You know they’ve got to be tired and frustrated after their fruitless endeavor. That’s when Jesus shows up. Only they don’t recognize Jesus at first. We can understand why – it’s still a little dark outside and Jesus is about 100 yards away (we know this from v 8). Also, Jesus is in His resurrected body which looks somewhat different in appearance from His physical body. So we can understand why the disciples would not recognize Jesus visually. But what’s curious is that the disciples don’t recognize Jesus when He calls out to them from the shore. “Children [term of endearment of a teacher to his students, He has used before with them, Jn 13:33], do you have any fish?” You can hear the frustration in their voice as they answer, “No.”

So Jesus proves once again that He is the Lord of creation. He tells the disciples, “Cast your net on the right side (on the other side) of the boat and you will find some.” The disciples don’t argue. They do exactly what this stranger on the shore has told them to do and, low and behold -- they catch so many fish that they can’t haul them all in! Now I want you to think back. When have we heard this same scenario played out before? It happened earlier in the gospels – way back, several years before, when Jesus first called Peter, James and John to be His disciples. Luke Ch 5 records this for us. And undoubtedly John remembers that event and he says, “It’s the Lord! It’s Jesus!” Peter realizes that John’s right. Ever the impulsive one, Peter gets himself dressed and dives right into the water. And although we are not told this, he presumably swims to the shore to greet Jesus. Meanwhile the other disciples maneuver the boat and head toward the shore and they and Peter probably arrive there about the same time. They’re all very happy to see Jesus – so happy that they leave their boat and the large catch of fish behind. When they arrive on land there’s Jesus! He’s got a charcoal fire going and breakfast cooking. I can just picture the scene in my mind. They’re all standing, just staring at Jesus. Jesus says, “Bring some of the fish that you caught.” Which they do.

John records that they caught large fish and that there were 153 of them. The number itself is not in and of itself significant. What is significant is that John records such a precise number. He was there and apparently was personally involved in counting the fish. Some 60 years later while John is penning his gospel (in 90 AD) he recalls the exact number of fish they caught that morning. I’m not sure why this number stuck in John’s mind but perhaps it was because this would be the last time any of these disciples would catch any fish. After this they would become, as Jesus called them, “fishers of men!”

The application from this incident for us is simply this: The Lord meets us where we are and uses what we have. When we obey His voice (directly from God’s word or that still small voice of the HS) He will bless us with spiritual abundance. Empty nets resulting from our own weak efforts are turned into full nets with His abundant provision. Bottom line, do God’s will God’s way and watch God work. Don’t try to analyze Him, just trust Him and obey Him.

Well, Jesus tells the disciples, “Come over and have some breakfast!” John says by this point all the disciples knew this was Jesus. The scene ends with Jesus serving His disciples breakfast in the early hours of the morning on the banks of the Sea of Galilee. It’s a sweet and precious memory indelibly impressed in John’s mind. Well, when breakfast is over the disciples go back to work. They secure the fish they had caught and they stow away the nets. But Peter remains behind. Jesus wants to talk to Peter alone. He has some unfinished business with him.

READ John 21:15-17

This is a well-known passage that you have heard preached before. Jesus asks Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” First of all Jesus uses Peter’s given name of Simon, the name he had before he met Jesus. This is the name Jesus used before whenever He rebuked Peter. Second, Jesus says, “Do you love me more than these?” Perhaps “these” refers to the boat and the nets Peter owned and that he depended on for his livelihood. Perhaps “these” refers to the other disciples. We’re not sure but whatever the case, Jesus is asking Peter, “Do you love Me supremely, above all other things, all other people?”

How many times does Jesus ask Peter “do you love Me”? Three times. One for each time that Peter had denied knowing Jesus back in John Ch 18. If you’ll recall when that happened, immediately after the rooster crowed Peter felt a deep remorse for what he had done. We’re told that he went out and wept bitterly. So Peter’s been carrying this burden of guilt around ever since that happened. He desires so much to be forgiven. Peter needs this from Jesus if he’s going to be able to move on and be an effective servant. And Jesus knows this.

So let’s talk about this exchange between Jesus and Peter. There are two different Greek words used during their conversation, both translated in our English Bibles as “love.” In Jesus’ first two questions, v 15-16, “do you love Me?” Jesus uses the word *agapeo*, the highest form of love, love the way that God loves (John 3:16 love); a perfect kind of love that Paul describes in detail in 1 Cor 13; a love that seeks first the welfare of others; a love that’s eager to serve. This is the kind of love in which a person is willing to lay down their life for another. In other words, a self-less, self-sacrificing, servant-hearted love.

In his responses to Jesus Peter replies, “Lord, You know that I love you.” But Peter uses a different word for love, the word *phileo*, which is a cherishing kind of love, a love where a person has a tender affection toward another and acts kindly toward them. It’s the kind of love that we most often show to our fellow man. Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love me with an *agapeo* love, a total commitment love? Peter’s reply, an honest one driven by his own personal failure, is “Lord, You know that I love you, but with a *phileo* love.” Jesus doesn’t rebuke Peter but instead He tells him, “Feed my lambs, tend my sheep.” In other words, “I need you to be the spiritual leader of this group.” Jesus wants Peter moving forward to be Peter, the rock, and not merely Simon, son of John, the man he was before he met Jesus.

Well the third time around Jesus gets down to Peter’s level and asks him, v 17, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” This time Jesus uses Peter’s word for love, *phileo*. “Simon, do you even really love me with tender affection?” This really hurt Peter. V 17 says he was grieved. “Lord, you know everything – you know my heart – you know that I love you.” Again he uses *phileo* love. Total honesty on Peter’s part. This is where he’s at. Jesus replies to Peter, “Feed my sheep.”

In this exchange Jesus forgives Peter and restores him. It’s a significant event that takes place there along the shore of the Sea of Galilee and only John records it for us. This has a profound impact on Peter. God begins to mold and change Peter from that day forward. Pentecost will come just a few weeks later and Peter who before had been bold and brash, who had wielded a sword in defense of Jesus – this same Peter now boldly proclaims Jesus. You could say he brandishes a sword of a different kind, the sword of the spirit, the word of God. And thousands of people will be convicted and be saved thru his preaching. God will also work on Peter’s deeply engrained prejudice against Gentiles. He will give him a vision and lead Peter to the home of Cornelius where he will present the gospel message and that entire household will be saved. God will use Peter in a mighty way. Peter WILL feed the sheep. He becomes a great leader in the early church and writes much needed words to lift up the scattered persecuted saints, the letters of 1 and 2 Peter. The true Peter is not seen in his denial of Jesus, a moment of weakness, in his personal failure. The real Peter is seen in his repentance. Jesus recognizes this. He knows Peter’s heart and He forgives Peter. Aren’t you thankful that if we go to our Lord in prayer and we confess our sins that He IS faithful and just to forgive us our sins and that He WILL cleanse us from all un-righteousness? Praise the Lord! God is in the business of grace, forgiveness and restoration. He’s a God of second chances. And aren’t you glad?

But Jesus isn’t finished. He has one more thing He needs to tell Peter. Look at v 18…

READ John 21:18-23

Jesus tells Peter that his following of Jesus is going to eventually cost him his life. He’s shooting straight with Peter. In fact, we know from history that this does happen, 36 years later, in about 67 A.D. Peter is eventually martyred for his faith. Tradition holds that Peter was crucified upside down because he didn’t feel worthy to be crucified like his Lord. Here in John Ch 21 Jesus lets Peter know that his commitment to Jesus will cost him his freedom and eventually his life. Nevertheless, Jesus says, “Follow Me.”

Would you be willing to give up all your dreams and ambitions to follow Jesus? Even if you knew it could cost you your life? This is exactly the course that Jesus lays out for Peter. Well Peter turns around and he sees his buddy John following them. “What about him? Is he going to die also?” Jesus replies, “If it is My will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!” In other words, “Don’t worry about him. You just be faithful to do what I tell you to do.”

READ John 21:24-25

John concludes his gospel emphasizing for us, his readers, that everything he, John, has just written is true and that he is bearing witness of it. As it turns out John will be the only one of the remaining 11 disciples who lives to be an old man and dies of natural causes. All the others – Peter, James the brother of John, Thomas, Nathaniel, Andrew, Philip, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the zealot, Matthew and Thaddeus – they all will die martyrs deaths. But not John. Jesus has a reason for the Apostle John living a long life. He is going to use John in his later years at a time of great trial and apostasy in the early persecuted church to write this Gospel – what we know as the Gospel of John – to show us clearly who Jesus is – the Messiah, the Son of God. John will also write three letters to encourage the saints and to teach them to love like Jesus loves, 1 2 and 3 John. And of course he’s going to record the revelation that Jesus Christ will give him in a vision on the island of Patmos, the Book of Revelation.

John tells us in closing there are so many more things that he could have told us about, the things Jesus did – he could have written volumes and volumes of material on Jesus. But what John has shared with us presents a clear picture, a clear understanding of who this Jesus is. So the question I close out our study with is this – Do you love Jesus? *Agapeo* type love, full commitment? It’s a fair question and we, like Peter, must answer it honestly. Take heart, my friends, no matter how you answer that question -- God is not finished with you yet. Until He takes you home He’s still working on you. May God bless the reading and study of His word – let’s sing!