

John 21: 1-19 Hope in Forgiveness: Peter re-instated and commissioned 4th May 2025

Lord Jesus, open our hearts and minds to hear from you as we look at word. Amen.

What do you do when you are feeling a bit lost, confused, unsure? We may seek to do something familiar at those times to ground us, to try and make things feel normal and okay again.

I wonder if that is why Peter went fishing that day with six other disciples. His world had been turned upside the past 3 years as he had followed Jesus, and then more recently all he thought he knew about Jesus and about himself had been challenged enormously. He had said he would never deny Jesus and he had done it 3 times just as Jesus had predicted. Then his Lord was crucified, and he was shocked, grieved, angry at himself and perhaps at Jesus for dying. But then Jesus appeared, resurrected - bringing peace and new hope.

In Mathews gospel we read that Jesus told them to go to Galilee and wait for him there. And so, it was by the sea of Galilee that Jesus appeared to the disciples again.

We don't know how long they had been waiting and maybe they were beginning to doubt...so Peter went back to what he knew. Fishing.

As I said last week, John's gospel feels like it finishes at the end of chapter 20. Jesus had appeared to the disciples, showed Thomas his resurrected body breathed on them with the Holy Spirit and sends them out. Then John writes about the purpose of his book – that we may read it and believe in the Messiah. Neat conclusion if you ask me.

But then there is chapter 21. It may have been a later addition, it's a bit like an epilogue in a book...and don't we all want to know what happened to Peter after he denied the Lord?

There was unfinished business between Peter and Jesus and this final chapter of John deals with that.

It echoes the beginning of their relationship when Jesus first called Simon Peter in Luke 5 to leave his fishing nets and follow him to be a fisher of people. Just like this story Peter had not caught anything that night when Jesus instructed him to put out in deep water and the nets almost broke with the amount of fish they caught. Peter fell at Jesus feet that morning declaring himself to be a sinful man, but that didn't stop Jesus from calling him to follow him.

Peter did follow Jesus; he did declare him to be the Messiah. He did love him, but he also tripped up and he denied him. I wonder if Peter was feeling oh so unworthy now to be a fisher for people, he was still feeling his sinfulness and didn't think he could be the rock and the leader that Jesus had called him to be.

So, he went back to his old familiar life.

But then...Jesus appears once more and this time the unfinished business between them is dealt with. That's why this last chapter of John must be included. It shows exactly why Jesus came to earth and died and rose again. He came to bring redemption and reconciliation, forgiveness and new life and purpose.

He came to bring abundant life, life that we cannot achieve on our own. Peter went back to fish, the life he thought he knew, seeking some familiarity, some satisfaction, some reward for labour...but he failed in his old profession that night, as he had when he first met Jesus; he didn't catch any fish. This would have just added to his feelings of unworthiness, I'm sure. But then there is this bloke on the shore telling them to let down their nets on the other side...they don't recognize this bloke straight away but I'm sure the huge catch of fish would have given something away and the disciple Jesus loved (John) says to Peter... "It's the Lord".

Peter did as Peter does and jumped straight into the water to get to Jesus first. He must have been longing to see him...that love for Jesus was still so strong.

The Lord was there to bless them, instruct them, to remind them to rely on him...that he will provide...abundantly. And did you note, that despite their doubts, their desertion of him on the night of his betrayal, and they were back fishing, Jesus calls them friends?

And he was there to sort things out with Peter.

Jesus was already cooking breakfast to share with them, to feed them. He didn't need what they had caught but he invites them to bring some of the fish. Fish they only caught under his guidance. He invites our participation. He then breaks the bread and if they weren't sure who he was before, they certainly were now. There may not have been wine this time, (it was breakfast!) but it was certainly a reminder no doubt of the last meal they had with him when he broke bread.

They finished breakfast and it seems Jesus and Peter perhaps went for a little walk on their own along the shore. I wonder how Peter was feeling, was his heart beating a little, waiting to be rebuked, disciplined or thinking that Jesus is going to tell him how disappointed he was with him for denying him? That is what we'd expect isn't it? When someone lets us down, we like to let them know they have disappointed us don't we. I know I have used that line with our children at various times...and it makes them feel sorry, for we don't like disappointing people we love do we?

Jesus already knew how Peter was feeling, he knows all our thoughts and feelings. He knew Peter would be feeling shame and guilt. Jesus doesn't accuse Peter or tell him he should have done better...he had been the one who told Peter he was going to deny him.

But at the same time, he doesn't ignore the fact that the denial happened, he doesn't ignore the fact that Peter is feeling bad. He speaks into Peter's pain and he restores him.

Three times Peter had denied Jesus, three times Jesus asks him if he loves him. This hurts Peter, for it reminds him of his sin, of his denying Jesus. Peter simply says, 'Yes Lord, I love you, you know that I love you, Lord you know all things; you know that I love you.' And how does Jesus respond? He doesn't spell out to Peter that he forgives him, rather he says; "Feed my lambs, take care of my sheep and feed my sheep."

You might think these are rather strange responses, but Jesus is showing total forgiveness here. We may say we forgive someone, but it might take us a while to really trust them again. Here Jesus is trusting Peter with his own mission to be a shepherd. Jesus had described himself as the shepherd of the sheep – protecting, feeding, calling them to follow him – and here he is asking Peter to do that – he is entrusting his sheep to Peter.

Then he indicates that it is not going to be easy, and that Peter too will have to lay down his life. But don't look back this time, just "follow me!"

This is the same command Jesus gave him 3 years ago, leave your fishing nets and follow me, you will be a fisher of people, feeding and caring for my sheep. But you won't be doing it alone. I will be with you; I will provide for you...look how I just showed you that in your fishing nets. But also remember that I said those who follow me must pick up their cross. Jesus had been to the cross for Peter, he's been there for us. He suffered, and there will be suffering as we follow Jesus – there are Christians being martyred today. We may be mocked for our distinct Christian values.

Following Jesus will involve suffering, but it will also involve triumph, for when Jesus went to the cross, he enabled true freedom from sin and guilt. Peter could now be free from the guilt he had been carrying; we can be free from the sin and guilt we carry...for Jesus defeated death and triumphed over sin so that we could be reconciled, restored and live an abundant life following him. What wonderful hope this is.

Jesus offers new beginnings. This final chapter of John is so important as it illustrates that wonderful redemption but also the commission we now have, to imitate Christ. To pick up our cross, to follow in the ways of Jesus, to reach out to the lost sheep, to nurture, to care for them.

Peter was a changed man after this encounter with Jesus and after being filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost he stood up empowered to be the rock on which Jesus was to build his Church, to preach and proclaim the gospel. Peter was transformed.

As Jesus called Peter, he also stands on the shore and calls us to follow him. He forgives us our sins. He restores us. He trusts us to be his Church here; he wants us to participate

in his mission, to share hope. He will help us catch fish or rather, people, for him. We can't do it in our own strength, only with Jesus empowering us, as we listen to him.

Do you have any unfinished business with Jesus, before you go fishing?

You may feel unworthy like Peter, so do you know that you are forgiven? Do you know that you are called? Do you love the Lord Jesus as Peter loved him and went on to serve him? God can reach people without us, and we hear amazing stories of people who have never heard the gospel having visions and dreams of Jesus. But we also know of the great need of people like you and me to participate in Jesus's mission to spread the good news. There is a new generation of people in Australia who no longer grow up hearing the bible stories and gospel truths. And how will they hear if we don't tell them as Paul says in Romans 10:14...*How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?* We are to have beautiful feet bringing good news. Jesus sends us, as the Father sent him.

In this season of Hope25, I pray that we can share the hope we have, the hope we have in receiving total forgiveness from Jesus, experiencing his grace. I pray that we will live as restored and transformed disciples who are full of the spirit of God proclaiming his name, caring for and feeding his people. Amen.