

**Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> May 2022**

**3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of easter**

**Christ our victory**

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*Open our ears, O Lord, to hear your word and know your voice.*

*Speak to our hearts and strengthen our wills, that we may serve you today, now and always. Amen*

Acts 9:1-20

Revelations 5:11-14

John 21:1-19

### **First person narrative from Peter's perspective**

I don't think I could ever look down at fish on a fire without remembering one of the most special days of my life. This particular day was the third time that Jesus had revealed himself to some of us disciples since his death on the cross.

On this particular day there were seven of us together. It was a very confusing time for all of us. First Jesus was dead. Knowing the last thing I did before His death was to deny even knowing Him, not once but three times, this was one of the lowest points of my life. Then came the excitement of that Sunday morning when we found that He was no longer dead but had risen and lived again.

Everyone was excited. Jesus appeared to ten of us in a locked room. Thomas wasn't there. Thomas wouldn't believe anything we told him. Then Jesus came back again a week later. This time Thomas too saw Jesus and believed.

It was all so exciting, at least for everyone around me. I was quite concerned. I walked around in a bit of a stupor. I couldn't help remembering Jesus haunting words on the night of His arrest, "Before the cock crows you will betray me three times." He knew what I was going to do. He knew it better than I did. He knew what I was going to do before I ever thought about it and it was something I thought I would never do. Yet I did deny Him. It was one of the stupidest things I have ever done. And, like any human, I have participated in my fair share of stupidity. In spite of all of that, however, Jesus still wanted me there to share the Passover meal with Him and all of the disciples. The love and understanding that Jesus has is absolutely amazing.

When we gathered together late that night, I didn't have any idea what to do, so I decided to do what I knew best. I said, "I am going fishing." I guess to the others it sounded like a good idea. There's nothing like a little fishing to relieve your mind of what's bothering you. Or, at least that is what I thought.

We put the boat out, lowered the nets, and brought them back up - EMPTY! I guess it was a bit of a metaphor for what my life was feeling like. For so long I felt like I had the world by the tail. I was part of a successful fishing business. Then Jesus came along and I decided to cast my lot with Him for a while. It was really great too, I became one of His most trusted disciples. I saw Him perform so many miracles. He healed so many people. He even had me walk on the water. Me, a fisherman from Galilee, walking on the water. Who would have ever guessed it? I certainly wouldn't have. Then, came that awful week. Jesus was arrested, I betrayed Him, and the Romans killed Him. It was bad, really bad. Truly it was the worst time of my entire life.

Now, after all of that, I didn't really know if Jesus would have anything to do with me any more. I just wanted to get away from all the hoopla. I wanted to get back to my roots. I wanted to get back to what I knew best, fishing. Now I couldn't even manage to do that right. Over and over again, we put down the nets and would bring them back empty. I think it was like all the fish in the sea had just disappeared. Or, I had just forgotten how to catch them.

I don't know why when we were so used to being together, but I was kind of surprised when the others wanted to come with me. I expected to be alone. I guess I thought that after I betrayed Jesus they would want to distance themselves from me. I guess the idea of going fishing was more appealing than I was threatening.

After a long hard night, we had nothing, I mean nothing, not even the tiniest fish to show for it. As daybreak came there was a man cooking something on the beach. We couldn't see who he was, he was too far away. He hollered out to us to cast our nets on the other side of the boat. When we did, boy did we catch fish. There were a total of 153 and the nets weren't broken at all. All of this seemed really familiar. It was kind of like a dejavu experience. When John said, it is the Lord, I remembered why. I remembered the time right after I first met Jesus. He used my boat to teach from. We had had another night of fishing with nothing to show for it. When he got through teaching he had me take to boat out to deeper water and lower my nets. I thought they would come back empty again, but they were so full we had to have the help of another boat to bring them all back. That was when I decided to go with Jesus. If he could do that I knew he could do great things.

With all these memories coming back, I knew John was right. I hurriedly got dressed, jumped in the water and swam back to shore. I had to know if Jesus would forgive me and allow me to even have a small role in His resurrected life.

When I got ashore, the others were soon behind me in the boat, Jesus had a fire going, one much like this one, with fish cooking on it. We added some of our fish from the boat. We all sat down and had breakfast together.

Most of the guys seemed to have a good time sharing this meal with Jesus. As for me, however, I still felt an aching in my heart and emptiness deep in my soul. I still didn't know how Jesus felt about me. I really wanted to know.

After breakfast, Jesus looked right straight at me. He pointed to the fish still cooking on the fire and he asked, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" It was like he was asking me, "Simon, do you love me more than the food you fill your body with?" I wanted to have Jesus back as part of my life more than anything. I said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Then Jesus told me to feed his lambs.

I remembered how he referred to the people as sheep and lambs. Was he now asking me, the one who betrayed Him, to care for His people? Was he trusting this to me? It seemed to me that this was good news. It must be that Jesus forgave me if he was going to trust me with a job like this.

Then Jesus looked at me again, pointed at the fire again, and again asked me, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" This made me grow a bit concerned. The first time I thought I was forgiven. But then, he was asking me virtually the same question a second time. As I listened though I sensed that his question had a different meaning. This time it seemed more like, "Simon, do you love me more than your old way of making a living?" I thought before that I had given up everything to follow Jesus. I know now that based on what I did, I still had more to give up. So, I answered Jesus again. "Yes Lord," I said, "you know that I love you." He answered, "tend my sheep."

Again it was like saying that I had a new job. I was to be a shepherd for Jesus' people. Though I was a bit concerned about being asked again, I was still excited about the possibilities for my future.

But, then Jesus looked at me for a third time. He pointed to the fish on the fire one more time and he asked me once again, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" This time I was more than concerned. I was hurt. I am not sure who I was more upset with, Jesus for asking, or myself for giving him a reason to ask. But one more time I told him, "Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you." Then, one more time Jesus said to me, "Feed my sheep."

By this point I was totally confused. But before I could start asking any questions Jesus went on. His language was a bit cryptic but he was talking about the way that I would die and that in my death I would glorify God.

Wow! It seemed to me at the time, and thinking on this has only served to confirm my thoughts that Jesus asked me if I loved him three times for a reason. He wanted me to know three things. First, he wanted me to know that he forgave me. Second, he was saying he had a job for me to do. And third, he wanted me to know that my life was not to be an easy one. But, just as he knew I would betray him, telling me what kind of death I would suffer confirmed that he knew I would always do the work he had given me.

Then he said to me the words I so longed to hear, "Follow me." And, my friends, that is just what I have done. I have spent the rest of my life doing what I believe he would want me to do. No, it hasn't always been easy. I have even spent time in jail for the sake of the Gospel. I also know that I will die a hard death, but I go content in my life. I know I have done the work that I was called to do. I have shared the Gospel, I have told His stories and the stories

I have shared with Him to any who would listen. Thankfully some have listened. Others have not, but I pray that I have planted seeds and one day they will begin to grow.

The reality of His story that not just me but what everyone should share, is that Christ has died, Christ has risen and Christ will come again and until that happens he has given each of us a job to do.

That is, to speak and share his life with anyone who will listen. To be a follower does mean to be an example of Christ's love to the world, and I have to keep myself in check with what I say to others and how I need to encourage and not tear down.

To be a messenger of hope to those around me

Yes, when I see fish on the fire, I remember back to that special day. It will always be special because it is the day that I knew that Christ forgave even me. It was the day he gave this old fisherman some work to do. The taste of those fish will never quite be the same.