

June 29, 2025
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“You, follow Me”

John 21:1–23

This is an event that took place at the Lake of Tiberias, that is, the Sea of Galilee. The disciples had returned to Galilee. That was because the resurrected Jesus had said the following to Mary Magdalene:

“Tell my brothers to go to Galilee. There they will see me” (Matthew 28:10).

And so, just as Jesus had promised, they were to reunite with Jesus. However, the disciples did not recognize Him immediately.

Perhaps they were living their usual lives, away from Jesus, and did not expect that He would come to them now. Or perhaps, each disciple had complicated thoughts, and their hearts were clouded, and they could not see Jesus.

Why did Jesus have the disciples go to Galilee? Why did He choose to meet them there? Galilee was a special place for the disciples. It was the place where a new journey had begun. From Galilee, the lives of the disciples walking with Jesus had started.

Three years later, after experiencing the events of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, the disciples were away from Jesus. Amid fear and anxiety, they wondered what was happening to them and what they should do next. Each one, while thinking various things, had returned to their former lives in Galilee.

In such a situation, Peter says, “I’m going out to fish.” Perhaps to distract himself from anxiety and worry, or to stay calm by doing his usual work and life, or perhaps considering living again as a fisherman—from whatever reason, he decides to go fishing.

The other disciples say, “We’ll go with you,” and follow him.

They had originally been fishermen. Though they may not have succeeded as disciples of Jesus, they believed their fishing skills hadn’t dulled, and they had some expectation in their own strength.

However, though they fished all night, they caught nothing. Though they were fishermen, they didn’t catch a single fish.

If they had caught even a few fish, it would have been some consolation. But instead, it brought them disappointment. They were not successful as disciples of Jesus. They couldn’t even fish properly. “There’s nothing we can do.” “What are we supposed to do now?”—such thoughts left the disciples in despair.

At that moment, the resurrected Jesus appeared.

As “dawn was breaking,” perhaps things were still hazy. Perhaps the disciples themselves were still in a daze. None of the disciples realized that the one standing on the shore was Jesus.

Jesus spoke to the disciples:

“Jesus said to them, ‘Children, you do not have any fish to eat, do you?’ They answered Him, ‘No.’” (John 21:5)

Was Jesus concerned for the disciples? He asked them, “Children, you do not have any fish to eat, do you?” The disciples replied, “No,” because they had caught nothing.

Even though they had gone fishing, even though they were fishermen, they caught nothing.

They had no food to eat. That was the disciples’ reality.

To such disciples, Jesus continued speaking:

“He said to them, ‘Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat, and you will find the fish.’ So they cast it, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great quantity of fish.” (John 21:6)

He told them, “Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat.” Moreover, He even promised, “and you will find the fish.”

Whether they believed that promise or simply hoped to catch just enough to eat, when they did just as Jesus said, they caught so many fish that they couldn’t haul the net in.

At that moment, “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” that is, John, said to Peter, “It is the Lord.”

He realized that the one standing on the shore was Jesus.

Seeing the large number of fish in the net, the disciples would have remembered a similar past event. That event is recorded in Luke chapter 5. It was their first encounter with Jesus at the Sea of Galilee. At that time, Jesus got into Peter’s boat and said, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” Even though they had worked all night and caught nothing, they were washing their nets.

Peter said, “But because You say so, I will let down the nets.” When he obeyed, a great number of fish filled the nets, and the nets began to break.

Then Peter fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man.” While others were also astonished, Jesus said to Peter,

“Do not fear; from now on you will be catching people.”

And then, “They pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed Him.”

The disciples remembered that event. The Sea of Galilee was the place of their encounter with Jesus, and the place where they had started as His disciples. “We became Jesus’ disciples in this very place.” Recalling that, and being surprised that Jesus once again came to them while they were fishing, and that again they had a great catch, they likely had hopeful expectations: “Is a new journey beginning here again?”

Three years walking with Jesus from their first encounter. Many things had happened. Especially in the end, Jesus was arrested, crucified, and the disciples ended up separated from Him. What would happen now? The disciples, who had been led by Jesus, were now apart from Him and were lost.

The disciples had begun to feel fear. In John chapter 20, we see them hiding in a room, locking the doors, silent, huddled together in fear. To that hiding place, the resurrected Jesus appeared and encouraged them: “Peace be with you.” Jesus wanted to free the disciples from fear and help them stand again. Yet, they could not easily stand up.

That was the weakness of the disciples—and it is our weakness as well. Even before, when Jesus spoke about the cross and resurrection, they couldn’t understand. When told to stay awake and pray, they fell asleep. “The flesh is weak,” Jesus said. We are weak.

The disciples—afraid, discouraged, crouching, darkened, drained, asleep, and weakened—are us. We are powerless. Without Jesus coming to help us, we can do nothing.

Even such disciples somehow managed to reach Galilee from Jerusalem. But even when they fished, they caught nothing. Their miserable state was revealed.

If only they had caught a little, they might have thought, “Even if we failed as disciples, we can still manage as fishermen.” But that was not the case. Again, they were made to feel their powerlessness. As disciples or fishermen—what can I even do?

At such a time, Jesus appeared on the shore and said, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat.” And they had a great catch. “It is the Lord, it is Jesus.” Peter, who was in the boat, immediately put on his outer garment and swam to shore to reach Jesus as quickly as possible.

The other disciples, dragging the net full of fish, returned by boat.

When the disciples reached the shore, Jesus had prepared breakfast for them.

“So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already made and fish placed on it, and bread.” (John 21:9)

Jesus had prepared a warm meal for the disciples—who had fished all night, were exhausted, hungry, and disappointed.

“Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish.” (John 21:13)

The disciples must have remembered Jesus at the Last Supper. “This is Jesus,” “This is the same Jesus who has not changed,” “The Jesus who guided us, taught us, and warmly loved us—He is here now.” They must have been deeply moved.

We too, in our daily lives, can find ourselves drifting away from Jesus. In such times, Jesus comes to us right in the midst of our everyday life, and from that ordinary place, He leads our lives forward.

We do not live aimlessly, nor do we strive in our own strength to meet our needs. We receive the grace that Jesus has prepared for us. Just like the disciples, we can do nothing by our own strength.

After they had finished the meal, Jesus speaks to Peter. Among the disciples, especially Peter must have had complicated feelings toward Jesus.

That is because, in front of Jesus who went to the cross, he had denied him three times, saying, “I do not know that man.”

I have betrayed Jesus. I have said I do not know Him.

I have distanced myself from Jesus. I wonder what Jesus thinks of someone like me. I have made Jesus sad. No, I have made Him angry. I am no longer a disciple of Jesus. What will He say to me? He must have been thinking such things.

To such Peter, Jesus says:

"When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?' Peter answered, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.'" (John 21:15)

"Simon, son of John" was Peter's original name. It was the name he had before Jesus called him Peter, which means “rock.” Jesus intentionally called him "Simon." Do you have the foundation of faith that is worthy of being called “the rock, Peter”? Jesus is asking him.

"Do you love me more than these?"

Peter must have been ashamed. Because at the Last Supper, he had pushed aside the other disciples and boasted, “I will lay down my life for you.”

And yet, in reality, before the cross, he had run away. Even though he had said, “I love Jesus more than the others,” “Even if others cannot, I can lay down my life for Him,” in the end, he did something worse than the others to Jesus.

At the moment Jesus asked, “Do you love me?” Peter must have been gripped in his heart by the depth of his sin, his weakness, and his shame.

Perhaps he felt like he was truly a worthless, miserable person, and wanted to run away from that place—wanted to distance himself from Jesus.

However, this time Peter did not run away. While knowing his own lack of love, still, he wanted to love Jesus. Precisely because he was helpless, he needed Jesus. Summoning all the strength he had, he answered Jesus:

“Yes, Lord. You know that I love you.”

As a disciple of Jesus, in response to Jesus’ love, Peter wanted to love Jesus, and start walking a new path again. That must have been Peter’s heart.

I want to be a disciple of Jesus. I cannot do anything on my own, but if Jesus leads me and uses me, I believe there is something even I can do.

Though I have no love, I want to love. Though I have no strength, I want to stay near Jesus by mustering up all my might. Such an image of Peter comes to mind.

And that figure is not just Peter’s, but it becomes my own. Though I am helpless, though I am a terrible person, though I am sinful and weak, I still want to love Jesus. I want to be with Jesus.

Precisely because I am so helpless, unless Jesus is with me, I can do nothing—I will shut myself in fear, I will see no light, I will not be able to stand up, I will not be able to move forward. That is why I cry out, “Jesus, please forgive me, please help me, please give me strength, please teach me love.”

If Jesus loves such a person as me, forgives me, and calls me, then I want to respond to that love, accept that forgiveness, repent, and once again, from this point on, start walking a new path. “I love you, Jesus. Please help me. Please use me. Please let Your life dwell in me”—I respond to Jesus in this way.

Looking at the figure of Jesus asking, seeing His gaze, hearing His voice, Peter must have become certain: “Jesus still loves this betrayer, me, without change.” He must have felt peace, thinking, “Jesus knows all my suffering and sorrow.” Jesus must have given him the

promise of forgiveness and salvation: “It is okay. Truly, you are sinful. That is why you must love me. And that love for me—I will give it to you.”

Peter, in response to the love of Jesus, says, “I want to love you.” This exchange happens three times. At the third time, it is written that Peter “was grieved.”

That was because Peter realized: Jesus asked him three times because he had said three times, “I do not know Jesus.”

Jesus revealed Peter’s sin, and that is why he was grieved.

However, at the same time, Peter must have felt: “Even so, Jesus loves me.” And he became certain: “By acknowledging my weakness and sin, and confessing that I love Jesus, I will be forgiven.”

Each time he confessed out loud to Jesus, “I love you,” “I love you,” “I love you,” Peter experienced forgiveness.

Even if we have betrayed Jesus, if we repent and desire to love Him, Jesus once again leads us as His disciples into a new journey. Jesus restores Peter from his past failures and sins, gives him forgiveness, and stands him up again as a disciple. He gives him the mission of a disciple.

Jesus not only repeats three times, “Do you love me?” But to the Peter who replies, “I love you,” He also repeats: “Feed my lambs,” “Shepherd my sheep,” “Feed my sheep.”

Not only forgiveness is given, but along with forgiveness, a mission is also given. “I forgive you. If you love me, then follow me. Obey me.” Within the love of Jesus, we are led to a new path.

Jesus, who loves us, washes our wounds, forgives our sins, and gives us a new mission.

Jesus said to Peter: “Follow me.” (v.19)

But Peter, at that moment, turned around and looked at John.

“Peter saw him and said to Jesus, ‘Lord, what about this man?’” (John 21:21)

Peter, who had been looking only at Jesus, took his eyes off Jesus and looked at another disciple. What about this man?

We also, even while talking with Jesus, even while focusing only on Him, hearing His voice, and seeking His guidance—sometimes we take our eyes off Jesus and move away from that close relationship, looking at those around us.

What about that person?

“Jesus is asking this of me—but what is He asking of that person?” And then we start thinking, “Maybe that person will be used by Jesus more than I will,” or, “Is that person properly following Jesus?” Even if we have made up our mind to follow Jesus, we still have the weakness of comparing ourselves to others.

Jesus answers Peter:

“What does another person’s life have to do with you? Isn’t another person’s life unrelated to you? Why do you care? Do not look at others—**you** follow me.”

Jesus speaks clearly.

“Jesus said to him, ‘If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.’” (John 21:22)

“What is that to you? You must follow me.”

You must live your own life. You must live the life I lead you in—Jesus encourages Peter in this way.

It is not something to worry about—what others are doing, where they are going, how long they live, what hardships or joys they have.

In fact, the later lives of Peter and John became very different. But both had the Lord’s leading, the Lord’s blessing, and fulfilled lives led by Jesus. Peter became the leader of the church and was martyred. John lived to old age and left us the Gospel and Revelation. Each one led by the Lord has their own life.

Today is a baptismal service, but thinking back on my own baptism, I remember that, during the preparation, I was concerned about others.

“I may believe in Jesus and be saved—but what about my friends? What about that person who does not know Jesus?” Or rather, “Isn’t that person more of a sinner than me? Shouldn’t they repent more than I should?”—I was more concerned with others than myself.

But the pastor said to me: “What matters now is your relationship with Jesus—not anyone else. Think first about what **you** will do.” I was taught that others have nothing to do with it. Even after being baptized, I think there are still times when we worry about others. “How is that person’s faith life going?” Or, “That person who doesn’t go to church seems happier,” and such.

But just as Jesus said to Peter, He says to us as well:

“What is that to you? You must follow me.”

What we ought to focus on is our relationship with Jesus—That I am being led by Jesus, that I am loved by Jesus, That I am following Jesus, That I love Jesus.

When Jesus asks us, “Do you love me?” I want to be someone who turns my eyes straight to Jesus and says, “Yes. I love you.”

What we should seek is not to be better than others, not the blessings of this world, But to receive the great love of Jesus poured into weak people like us, And live out a life sustained by that love, all the way to the end.

“You must follow me.”

We want to begin, here and now, a life following Jesus—a life sustained by Jesus.