

Part 4: Four Pictures of Following Jesus

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April 11, 2021

Welcome back to our final sermon in our Easter series surveying the book of John. For a number of years now we have stretched our Easter series past Resurrection Sunday to include the following Sunday for one big reason: The events of Easter are only the beginning of our story.

Stopping the Easter story at the resurrection would be like cutting the Narnia series off after book two. Yes, in the "Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe" we see through Aslan's resurrection that he and he alone has the ability to save and secure Narnia from the powers of dark magic. But that was only the beginning of the adventures Aslan's disciples would have as they wrestled with faith and doubt in Aslan's world.

Just as the story of Narnia was changed by the person of Aslan, so too when we see Jesus for who he is the whole story of our life is rewritten with new hope in the face of old dangers in familiar places.

This Easter series we wanted to see what it looks like to have Jesus shaped belief in Jesus. Lots of people believed in Jesus in the book of John, but many of them failed to have abiding and enduring belief. They fell away. So what did those who endured believe? What did they see that others didn't?

This is what we have been focusing on so far. On Palm Sunday we looked at what Jesus wants his us to see about who he is and how he loves his friends. On Good Friday we looked at what Jesus wanted us to see about why he pursued the cross, where it was Jesus love for us and for his Father that drove him to die. And on Resurrection Sunday we saw what Jesus wants us to see about life in a broken world. Because Jesus died and rose again we know that a life of faith in Jesus is a life where God often uses incredible sorrow to bring us unshakable joy.

But today we are going to see **What Jesus wants us to see about following him.**

That is, what comes next for the believer? If you're not a believer, today will give you a great picture into the life we have the privilege of living as we follow Jesus.

Our text today highlights three post-resurrection appearances Jesus has with his disciples in the book of John. In these appearances Jesus is going to equip and encourage his disciples with what they need to know about following him.

We are going to see four points this morning: **Following Jesus is being sent by Jesus** (John 20:19-23), **Following Jesus is belief in Jesus** (John 20:24-31), **Following Jesus is trusting in the provision of Jesus** (21:1-4) and lastly **Following Jesus is life and death for the glory of Jesus** (21:16-25).

Let's begin by looking at our first appearance of Jesus Christ to the disciples. To bring us up to speed this story picks up on the evening of Resurrection Sunday.

That morning Peter, John and Mary went to the tomb and found it empty. But Peter and John left and went home, whereas Mary stayed and she saw the resurrected Lord and told the disciples about it.

So our story today picks up this evening where the disciples know two things: 1. The Tomb is Empty, and 2. Mary says that Jesus is alive.

Read with me: **John 20:19-23**.

The first thing I want us to see before we get too far in this morning is the privilege of hearing the words, "Peace be with you" from Jesus Christ. Why did Jesus lead with "peace" in this passage? Because nothing about the experience the disciples had over the past 72 hours was peaceful. In fact their whole world turned upside down.

When Jesus appeared before them the gap between who they were and who Jesus was became increasingly larger. Here is the one who was God, the firstborn from the dead, the one who will judge the world. What a frightening experience this would have been!

One day each and every one of us will stand before the resurrected Lord and our world will indeed be turned upside down. For the believer and for the unbeliever our perception of Jesus' holiness, beauty and righteousness will be exponentially bigger than we ever imaged but in that world turning, reality displaying moment there is only one hope. That hope is that Christ would meet you with the words: "Peace be with you."

What qualifies this response? What makes us proper recipients of the world's greatest comfort in the face of everything we are not? Nothing but faith in the one who can give us this peace. This is what Jesus did on the cross for all of his disciples. He takes away the hostility our sin deserves and proclaims to us peace in his work.

If you were to stand before Christ today, would you know this peace? My hope is not only that you would say, "Yes," but you would do so with clarity as to why Jesus give you peace. We will circle back around to this later, but for now I want to get at our first point today and that is: **Following Jesus is a being sent by Jesus**.

Here after proclaiming peace to his disciples, he sends them out for a life of ministry. Peace is not passivity in following Jesus, in peace Jesus sends us out.

You have to imagine what went through the disciples head when Jesus appeared. Here comes their resurrected Lord and Savior, who appeared in physical form in the middle of a locked room, and the sum of his message is this: "Get ready, you've got work to do."

Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, even so, I am sending you."

Sending them out for what? To proclaim and affirm the message of salvation. That's what Jesus is getting at in verse 23.

What Jesus is here applying distinctly and privately to the disciples is something that Jesus makes public and corporate at his ascension in **Matthew 28:18-20**.

Paul picks up on the nature of this sent-ness in **2 Corinthians 5:19-20**.

As disciples of Jesus his resurrection sends us out into the world with the message of salvation to help those who haven't yet believed and to further encourage those who have believed. If you're someone who wrestles with the reality of "What am I called to do?" the resurrection of Jesus is the job description you've been waiting for.

You've been called to be sent out by Christ into the world. You've been called to help others see and apply the wonderful hope of "Peace be with you" in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But more than that you are sent in the same way Jesus was sent by the Father. Isn't that astounding? While Jesus was on earth we saw his laser focus on his purpose. It was his weapon when he was tempted and his comfort when his soul was tried. But here too the church is given the same intentional purpose which should shape our lives.

We find purpose in our own lives by looking at the way in which Jesus understood his own purpose in life.

Look at what Jesus shared with his disciples earlier in John: **John 13:14-17**.

A life of being sent by Jesus is a life being sent to serve others with the message of Jesus. This includes how we serve people with the explicit words of the message of Jesus, but also how we serve others with the loving actions of the message of Jesus.

How you serve your brothers and sisters is part of Jesus' plan for his followers. How you engage in conversation, relationship and evangelism with those in your neighborhood is part of Jesus' plan for his disciples. All of life in this way is part of God's purpose for you.

But take heart, Jesus does not send you out alone or ill-equipped, he gives you the Holy Spirit himself.

Now, there's some context here which is important. This event here is a private event between Jesus and his disciples. In this room, Jesus was preparing in a unique way his Apostles to teach, equip and establish the early church.

The word apostle simply means "sent one" in fact the Greek word Jesus uses when he says he was sent from the Father is the Greek word *Apestalken*.

The office of Apostle was real in the early church, but once we see the churches established by the Apostles the office of Apostle goes away. Why? Because it was only Jesus who creates these capital "A" apostles.

But despite how unique John 20 is we see how general and universal Acts 2 is. In Acts 2, after Jesus has ascended he fills the whole church with the Holy Spirit. We have been empowered for ministry as the church with the Holy Spirit. We are not sent out on our own, we have the promise of the Holy Spirit.

When I perform weddings there comes a part of the service where I ask the each individual: "What token do you offer that you will keep this covenant and fulfill these vows?"

The token is the wedding ring. It's a symbol that we will do all that we have promised to do. The Holy Spirit is the wedding ring given to the believers in the church. But far more than being a sign of the

promise, the Holy Spirit is the promise itself that Jesus will keep his word to us, love us and use us for his glory.

It is through the Spirit filled church that the message of salvation in Jesus will save the lost and strengthen the saints.

There's an old tradition in many churches where the doors of the church are painted red. There's a number of theological reasons behind this but one reason is because of this Spirit-filled sent-ness of the church. When people come into the church, they come only by the blood of Christ. But when people leave the church, they are sent out empowered by the blood of Christ.

What does it look like for you to be sent out by Jesus? Where are you stewarding by the power of the Holy Spirit the message of forgiveness and salvation and serving others in the way that Christ has served us?

As wonderful as this event was for the Apostles, it was a bit tainted in that one of them was missing: Thomas. It's in light of this absence that we turn to our second appearance of Jesus. Read with me: **John 20:24-29**.

So here we have our second point this morning: **Following Jesus is belief in Jesus**.

We love to give Thomas a hard time in the story, but what a privilege it is to read the story of Thomas.

Thomas was I'm sure like you and I would be, skeptical, but still a bit optimistic. I love the model Thomas shows for his doubt there. What a wonderful picture of waiting, quite literally, on the Lord.

How many of us would have doubted in skeptical unbelief the moment we heard Jesus rose again and simply left? How many more would have become increasingly frustrated when it seems everyone but you had this encounter with the risen Jesus?

But here, eight days afterwards, and Thomas is still with the disciples. For those who doubt, for those who wrestle with experiences of others in light of your own experience, look here at Thomas. One can assume that Thomas continued to follow Jesus with his doubt trusting, hoping, that Jesus would ultimately answer them.

Notice the detailed ultimatum Thomas gives: unless I see him, and touch his hands, and put my hand in his side, I will never believe.

We often make our own demands of faith in God based on the standard of what we think our minds need to believe. But the stunning thing about this text is that when Jesus appeared, Thomas didn't need to touch him. He saw and believed. The list we think we need to believe is often larger than what Jesus actually uses to make us believe. We don't know what we need, but Jesus knows exactly what we need.

And this is where John as the author inserts himself into the narrative. In our other stories today it is Jesus who commissions the disciples, but in this story of Thomas, John commissions the reader: **John 20:29-31**.

What is his commission: "You, reader of this gospel, believe in Jesus Christ."

Where Christ died once and for all, here John is saying that Thomas doubted once and for all. Thomas doubted for you so that you might believe in Jesus.

Knowing the story of Jesus, even following Jesus as a physical disciple means nothing if you do not ultimately believe that Jesus is the one sent from God to deal with our sins and restore us into fellowship with him.

Why? Should you believe? Because it makes sense of the most basic realities of this world. The creative genius of our world demands a creator. The varied sources of happiness we have in this world shows us that there is something beyond our five senses which is meant to satisfy us. The pain in this world screams that something is broken. Seeing Jesus as the creator, the all satisfying King, and the death destroying savior is the most comprehensive of all world views.

But we believe not because we must reconcile our minds, but because we must enliven our hearts. We believe so that in believing we may have life in his name. That is our confidence before a resurrected Lord.

Here is life! If only you would come! Here is hope in times of confusion if only you would believe. Here is Jesus if only you take up eyes to see. Following Jesus in life requires eyes which daily see Jesus in faith. This book was written so that you might read the story of Thomas and say in your own heart: "My Lord and my God."

From that moment on, life will never be the same. This is what we see as we enter into our third appearance of Jesus and our last two points this morning.

Read with me: **John 21:1-14.**

Here we see our third point this morning: **Following Jesus is trusting in the provision of Jesus.**

I have to admit that I misunderstood this story at first. I almost saw it as a sign of abandoning Jesus. Peter was so confused after Jesus died that he went out fishing. But we haven't yet at this point seen Jesus' great commission to his disciples, though he has started the process of preparing them for it, he has not yet ascended.

What drove the disciples to the sea was instead two things. The first was their poverty. They had left everything to follow Jesus, and now they had to make a living. Peter and a handful of disciples knew how to fish, so that's what they went back to do.

The second motivation was what motivated them to go fishing at night: fear.

We've seen three appearances so far, each of which has shown a level of fear in the disciples. First they were hiding behind locked doors for fear of the Jews, then they were again, eight days later behind locked doors.

Now in their poverty they were hungry, in their association with Jesus they were in danger, so the solution to their hunger and their fear was to take to the seas at night.

But we see their efforts, efforts of mostly trained fishermen, were unsuccessful all night long until a stranger appeared on the shore.

It's almost salt in the wound at first when the man says, "You got anything?"

But then he encourages them to move their nets to the other side. Which I'm sure was the fisherman's equivalent of being asked, "Did you try turning it on and off?"

But from that moment forward, the hunt was on.

Brimming with fish the disciples realize that the man was Christ, Peter nearly drowns himself to see him and they share a wonderful breakfast on the shore.

Don't we see in this text the kind provision of Jesus to all his disciples?

What stood out to me the most was something made really clear by all the context up until this point. The disciples had nothing when they left to follow Jesus, the disciples had been hiding behind locked doors for fear of being associated with Jesus, the disciples were forced to go out and find food and income at night, they labored a long time fumbling in the darkness and catching nothing, then they pull in the heaviest load they ever had, breathing heavy, sopping wet only to come to the shore and what do they find: **John 21:9**.

Jesus already had the fish.

But then he looked at what he just provided for them by his own miracle and said, "Well I guess we can cook some of that too."

When we go out into the world to follow Jesus we can do so free from fear and frustration because Jesus will provide for us everything we need to follow him. This isn't without means, as Jesus didn't rebuke the disciples for their work, but he wanted to provide them comfort in it.

As we follow the disciple's lives, we don't see them creating a fishing empire driven by faith. That's not the point of this miracle. The point of the miracle is that as we go out into the workplace and into our lives of ministry as sent ones, our financial provision and our missional fruit always and only come at the hand of Jesus, which means we can trust in him at all times.

That doesn't mean he provides what we want when we want it, but it means he gives us what we need when we need it.

Where in our financial or in our spiritual lives do we operate as if Jesus is not the one who ultimately fills our nets? But consider Jesus' own words in **Matthew 6:25-33**.

Walking with Jesus means we sometimes strain through nights of darkness, but it also means that we know at some point we will eat with Christ on the shore.

This is where we now transition to the final point this morning: **Following Jesus is life and death for his glory.**

Following the breakfast Jesus goes on a walk with Peter, and John follows. We read this exchange in **John 21:15-25**.

So what do we see in this text? Well first and foremost we see how profound redemption is in Jesus Christ.

Nothing you do can earn you salvation in Jesus Christ, but salvation in Jesus Christ changes everything you do.

Don't we see that in Peter? Remember the last time Peter stood around a charcoal fireplace in John it was where he denied Jesus three times. Here around this charcoal fire pit, Jesus allows Peter to three times reaffirm his love for him as Jesus commissions him to a life of feeding Jesus' sheep.

If you've wondered how free Jesus' offer of redemption is, look here. If you've wondered how freeing reconciliation is, look here.

When we say Jesus paid it all, we mean Jesus paid it all and purchases for us new life and new purpose.

Consider another example of this, the former slave trader John Newton who was converted and ended up fighting for the abolition of slavery and served as a pastor for 43 years. Look at the power of life with Jesus displayed in his own words summarizing his life: **"JOHN NEWTON, Clerk, Once an Infidel and Libertine, A Servant of Slaves in Africa, was, by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior JESUS CHRIST, preserved, restored, pardoned, And appointed to preach the gospel he had long labored to destroy."**

Jesus saves people, people broken in sin, and he says to them: Follow Me.

For Peter, Jesus predicts that this call to tend the Lord's sheep would ultimately cost him his life. Peter was in fact crucified for his faith, with arms stretched out just as Jesus predicted. Here, Peter who once denied Jesus to save his life was given a purpose big enough in which to lose his life.

But then there is John, the other disciple who is alluded to here, the same John who is writing this book.

Peter sees that he will glorify God in his death and he points back to John (either in love or in jealousy) and says "What about him?"

But Jesus says to him, "What does it matter Peter if John lives forever, you follow me."

What we know, and what John himself clarifies, is that Jesus didn't promise that John would live forever. But church history also tells us that John was the last of the disciples to die. Where Peter would follow Jesus into an early death, John would follow Jesus into a long life. Both lived for God's glory.

What hope we have for us in the examples of Peter and of John! Two men. Two ministries. Two portraits of following Jesus. Two stories of death. And yet one end: glorifying God.

Jesus saves many people, Jesus calls many followers, while we are all following Jesus to the same end, each of our lives is a uniquely your way of following Jesus and glorifying God. This means that the provision of Jesus' salvation in the gospel fuels the purpose of holy and commissioned living in all of life.

As followers of Jesus this story shows us that the whole of our lives of following Jesus is meant to be used for God's glory and that includes the days we live and the day we die.

This book ends with John saying that Jesus did many things, so many things that we couldn't fill the books of the world with them. But there is a sense where I think John is anticipating other things. Things that Jesus' followers would do.

This seems to be what Jesus himself has in mind. Look at this progression.

We see this first when he surprises Nathanael by knowing his story before they even met: **John 1:50**.

Then when the disciples are amazed at the miracles of Jesus look at what he says: **John 5:20-21**. Jesus will do greater things on the cross.

But look at what he says about all who follow him: **John 14:12**.

How will we do greater things? By living life in light of our King who has saved us and gone to Father. By living the whole of our lives for his glory in light of the cross.

Look how Paul communicates this truth in **Philippians 1:20-21**.

Brothers and sisters the call to follow Jesus by faith is a weighty call of service, trust and mission. But it is a call which provides what it promises: we will glorify God. We will draw deep joys from the well of grace as we live for his glory and know him more intimately in the world.

This life is where our life begins as we draw closer to Jesus every day.