

“What’s the Point?” John 20:30- 21:25 5/19/19

Two weeks ago we had a celebration of the tenth anniversary of our ministry together. (Thank you to everyone who took part in that celebration or sent cards!) During the program, the staff put together a humorous song in my honor. That’s always a dangerous thing. My wife wrote most the lyrics- still more dangerous. Anyway, one of the verses of the song said, “Who preached through the book of John? David preached through the book of John. Who made John go on and on? David made John go on and on...” Hmm. In rebuttal, I’d like to point out that although we started the series on John about a year ago, we did take a break from it during Advent and Christmas. Just sayin’. And I’d like to tell the staff, and especially the lyricist, that today we are finishing the series on John, and – not only that- but we’re ending a whole week early!

Let’s start at the end of chapter 20. Jesus has risen from the dead, and just had his dramatic encounter with Thomas, showing him the wounds in his hands and side. ³⁰*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.* ³¹*But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.* (John 20:30-31)

This sounds like a conclusion to the book, doesn’t it? For one thing it clearly summarizes the purpose of the book- “so that you may come to

believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.” “Believe” is a key word throughout John’s gospel. It doesn’t mean mere intellectual assent or agreement; it means to trust wholeheartedly in something. To act like you believe Jesus is God in the flesh, to entrust your life to him, knowing that he has your best interest at heart. That’s the point of the book!

But, strangely, the book doesn’t end here! It goes on to tell us about a couple more encounters between the risen Jesus and his disciples. These stories were probably added a little later, but that doesn’t mean they didn’t happen. And, they actually illustrate for us what a life believing in Jesus looks like. Here’s the first story.

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. ²Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. ³Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will go with you.” They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. ⁴Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵Jesus said to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” They answered him, “No.” ⁶He said to them, “Cast the net to the right

side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. (John 21:1-6)

(Several of the disciples, fisherman by trade, had left Jerusalem to go back to their homes by the Sea of Galilee. Now some commentators have criticized them for doing this. After all, Jesus just gave them the Holy Spirit and commissioned them to bring the gospel to others, and they’re not doing that; They’re fishing! But others have pointed out that they needed to make money in order to feed their families, and there is nothing wrong with making an honest living. I’d also point out that when we’re in crisis- and these disciples certainly were- most of us go back to what we know how to do- in this case, fishing!)

Two things strike me about this story. First, followers of Jesus are not spared from the ordinary challenges of living. Sometimes you catch fish; sometimes you don’t! That’s what happened here. But, the story also reminds us that Jesus cares about us as we deal with these ordinary life-challenges, and stands ready to help us as we listen to him and obey him, as Jesus did here. Let’s keep going.

⁷That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. ⁸But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a

hundred yards off. ⁹When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. ¹⁰Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” ¹¹So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹²Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, “Who are you?” because they knew it was the Lord. ¹³Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. (John 21:7-14)

Here, at Jesus’ invitation they have a little meal together with their McFish sandwiches on the beach. “Come and have breakfast,” Jesus says. The story reminds us that fellowship with Jesus was and is still possible, because he is alive. These are times when Jesus encourages and instructs us. Today it happens through the work his Spirit. It can happen as we read the Bible, as we pray, take a walk in the woods or on the beach, and as we serve others. And it often happens when Jesus’ followers are gathered together, like we are this morning! Making time to be with Jesus is part of a life of following him. Let’s keep going.

¹⁵When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you

know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.”¹⁶ A second time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.”¹⁷ He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.¹⁸ Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.”¹⁹ (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, “Follow me.” (John 21:15-19)

In this well-known story, Peter, who had recently denied Jesus, is reconciled with him and re-commissioned for the work to which God is calling him as a shepherd of God’s sheep. He is forgiven for his cowardice and restored to his place in the circle of Jesus’ followers. I love the reminder in this story that Jesus is the in business of taking ordinary, broken people and doing amazing, important work through them.

The movie “Hoosiers” tells the story of the small-town Indiana Hickory High School basketball team that unexpectedly wins the state championship. An important character in the story is an alcoholic named

Shooter (played by Dennis Hopper). He has failed at most things in life, but has a deep knowledge and love for the game of basketball. The team's coach, played by Gene Hackman, decides to give Shooter another chance in life, asking him to be his assistant coach. Shooter agrees, but only after eliciting a solemn promise from the coach that he won't get kicked out of any games, leaving Shooter in charge!

During a pivotal game, the coach unexpectedly pulls the referee aside and says, "Kick me out of the game!" The ref has no idea what's going on but obliges and tosses him out, leaving Shooter in charge of the team. Shooter is terrified. The end of the game is near and the score is tied. The opposing team has the ball. The Hickory players call a time out. In the team huddle, everyone is looking to Shooter for direction, including his son. But Shooter is paralyzed by fear, and can't even speak. Finally, his son says, "You reckon number four will put up their last shot, Dad?" That seems to get through to Shooter, who hesitantly calls a play.

The team runs the defensive play and steals the ball. Shooter calls another time out and with growing confidence calls the final play. The team executes it to perfection and wins the game. Shooter is jubilant, and perhaps for the first time, his son is proud of his Dad! But this was only possible because the coach decided to take a chance on a shame-filled, broken-down alcoholic, giving him another chance.

That's exactly what Jesus did with Peter, and it's exactly what Jesus will do with each one of us. No matter what you've done, no matter how long you've been away from him, Jesus is willing to forgive you and give you another chance. That's the good news, the very heart of the gospel! Just a few verses left.

²⁰Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; he was the one who had reclined next to Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?" ²¹When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about him?" ²²Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!" ²³So the rumor spread in the community that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?" (John 21:20-23)

This disciple "whom Jesus loved" shows up a number of times in John, especially late in the gospel. It is probably John, the writer, himself. Peter asks Jesus what is going to happen to John. Jesus in essence tells him to mind his own business. He is to focus on his own job, which is simple, but extremely difficult. It is to follow Jesus no matter the cost, and Jesus has already told Peter that the cost will be great.

After these two brief stories of Jesus having breakfast with seven of his disciples, and the restoration of Peter, the gospel ends with these words. (SLIDE #6)

²⁴This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true. ²⁵But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. (John 21:24-25)

The last verse reminds us that following Jesus- getting to know him and love him and serve him- is a deep well, the depths of which we will never be able to plumb. In fact, the end of the book reminds us of its beginning, where Jesus is called the “Word of God,” who was involved in the Creation of all there is, and who became one of his creatures here on earth to make a way for us to be reconciled with God. It is a fantastic story made even better because it is true!