

Newness of Life: Newness of Relationships (John 21)

The Epilogue. Do you remember the Streets of San Francisco. It still gets re-runs on Sat TV, it starred Karl Malden and Michael Douglas. One of the features of that show was that it always had the Epilog without the “ue” because it was an American program (without the “me”). Whatever happened, the Epilog always had a happy end as the two Californian detectives solved the case and banged up the criminals to their just desserts.

The epilogue is the bit that comes after the main story because the author wants to add something that helps us wrap up the story. We have spent this weekend looking at the unique recollections of the apostle John. Unique because they are quite different from the other gospels and John sticks to his eyewitness testimony, particularly of the post-resurrection testimony in giving us this epilogue. John seems to have written it for a reason beyond what he had planned to say because as it says in verse 21 *When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?"* 22 *Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me."* 23 *Because of this, the rumour spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?"* It seems that some were saying that John had been spared until the Lord returns because he said: *If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?* Because this was said to Peter and John by Jesus post-resurrection, John puts the story as an epilogue to make it clear that Jesus had not predicted that he would be alive until Jesus returned but that it was not Peter's (or anyone else's business for that matter) what would happen to John; that was to be according to Jesus will. We know John did live until old age and probably died of old age too.

So that tells us why the epilogue was written but in doing so, John tells us something about the relationship between Jesus His disciples, particularly Peter by just relating it. As we have looked through parts of John's gospel this weekend we should have seen that John focuses as he usually does on relationships. As most of you were here for our series on 1 John it gives us another opportunity to see how John focuses on the relationships that the risen Christ brings.

Let me start by summing it up: The risen Christ brings newness of life and newness of relationships.

This comes out of this very personal passage that John relates. We know from the other gospels that Jesus had told the disciples to go into Galilee so we find seven of the eleven disciples going fishing. Why? It probably wasn't anything to do with them losing their faith as some suggest. It was just that they needed to do something whilst waiting for Jesus. They had already met Him twice so I expect that unlike the situation with Thomas we looked at this morning, they were looking forward with expectancy to what Jesus was going to do next.

The Risen Christ brings newness of life and newness of relationships.

A New Relationship

Is this story just a bit familiar? If you know your gospels it is. Turn to Luke chapter 5:1 *One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God,* 2 *he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets.* 3 *He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.* 4 *When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."* 5 *Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught*

anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." 6 When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. 7 So they signalled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. 8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" 9 For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, 10 and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." 11 So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Familiar stiff from the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Luke's account of the call of four the disciples who were there in John's epilogue involved a similar circumstance - some instructions as to where they should drop their nets. Why did they follow Jesus on either occasion. Maybe they thought He had noticed something they had not - perhaps they thought He had spotted the shoal of fish on the shoreline as far as they were concerned? Whatever, on each occasion they followed His instructions and had a huge catch of fish.

When they first saw Jesus here in John 21, they didn't know who He was because they didn't recognise Him - he was on the shore and it was first light. So how did they in the end realise it was Jesus - because they had seen it all before some three years before. And for John the penny dropped. "It is the Lord!"

Peter was in the water and straight to the shore without getting his clothes on. People often contrast Peter's response now with what he had said days before about never denying Jesus and comment on how penitent and ashamed Peter must have felt. That's true, but I would suggest by this day that wasn't the issue here.

He had already met Jesus twice as did the others and they knew that they were forgiven and accepted. More interesting is the contrast between this time and the previous time they had a huge catch. Look what Peter said then: *8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" 9 For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, 10 and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners*

And we can see that the feeling was mutual with the other disciples. As he saw the power of God unleashed on nature, a part of nature they were astonished and for Peter as he looked into the act of a holy God, he knew that he was sinful and not fit to be in His presence - , *"Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"*

What a difference three years and resurrection made! Peter sees this amazing miracle again and rather than want Jesus to go away, he jumps in the water so quickly that he forgets to put his clothes on! He couldn't wait to see Jesus. Why? Because even though he had failed as a disciple in boasting that he would never deny Jesus and then did, he knew that he was forgiven. He had met the risen Christ twice, he now understood what it was all about and he was overjoyed to see Him. He wanted to be in Jesus presence rather than being to ashamed of his sinfulness that he wanted Jesus to depart.

Do you feel you have failed Jesus and feel inadequate? Maybe you feel negative about your faith? Jesus died so that you could be a child of God. He died to deal with your sin, failure and inadequacy. Like Peter, why not rush with excitement to Jesus this evening because he is the one that picks us up when we have failed in life, when we have failed in His service and we find acceptance. One of the highlights for my preaching last year was when I preached on Romans 8:1 - There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. The scene of an excited Peter jumping over the side of His boat to reach Jesus tells us that quite simply. The man who had failed so badly knew forgiveness. Their relationship was renewed because of the forgiveness that Jesus brings.

A New Commission

The Risen Christ brings newness of life and newness of relationships. For Peter it was a new role. At the first big catch situation Jesus said *"Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men."* For them it was a change of occupation from being fishermen to fishing for men - being evangelists. And if you've been here over the last 19 months you should have found out somewhere along the way that the disciples were no strangers to performing miracles, driving our demons and preaching the kingdom.

In the world of the raised Christ I guess this remained largely true, but we see Peter now gaining a specific role.

Jesus asks Peter three times if he loved him? A sensible thing you may say because after all it wasn't long since Peter had failed Jesus. And you can see Peter getting impatient because Jesus is asking the same question. But look more closely. Jesus gives three different commands:

Feed my lambs
Tend my sheep
Feed my sheep

Look carefully. Lambs are babies, they need basic nourishment and that isn't difficult. A lamb is helpless and needs to be nurtured. Peter had this charge. But in the second command he is called to be a Pastor. He is called to tend the sheep. The word for sheep here is probatia (probation) - young sheep that need to mature; that need leadership, care and supervision. The third makes it go even further. He is called to feed the probatia - more demanding than feeding the lambs. Someone of maturity and experience was needed. And who was that man? Peter. The one that just two or three weeks earlier had denied his Lord.

No longer was he to be just a fisher of men, but a keeper of sheep and he took an important role in the development of the early church. it doesn't matter what our past is, even our recent past - God can still use us for His glory.

But there's more about Peter, because his attitude had changed. Rather than the bold and brash of a few weeks earlier, his attitude is altogether more humble here. Look at the words again.

"Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus uses the standard word agapeo for love here. This is the self denying love that took Jesus to the cross. But Peter replies with the word philo - it means love but is not as intense as agapeo. It was the same the second time Jesus asked him. There is significance here. No longer the brash man. he was a man who could not say "I'll love in the way You have" - because he had bottled out and the answer shows humility - he loves but knows his limitations. By the third time when Jesus says, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He's using philo too. In His grace Jesus recognises Peter's limitations but still gives him the charge to feed His sheep.

We have a gracious Lord. He is a risen Christ who calls us to live His risen life and serve Him and we have been exploring that over the past few weeks for some of you. We have our calling like Peter did.

But maybe you feel compromised by your own inadequacy. When Jesus asks you “Do you love me” then you do say you love Him but like Peter you are not sure you could go quite as far in showing your love for Jesus as He showed for you.

Then you are in good company, so was Peter but it did not disqualify him for service. he was still a man who went forward in the power of the Holy Spirit to make a huge impact. And his love didn’t stay at philo - it ended as agape. As Jesus predicted, Peter was taken by others and he paid the price for being a follower of Christ.

Jesus wants to use us where we are and to take us where He wants us to go. Are we going to be like a humbled Peter and follow Jesus with a devotion that extends God’s kingdom. I believe we are all called to it.

A New Destiny

In one sense Peter, John and the other disciple’s destiny had already been mapped. But having heard of his, Peter sees John following (who had heard everything) and asks Jesus about his destiny. It wasn’t surprising as Peter knew of the love Jesus had for John. Quite why Peter asked it we are not told. Was it just brotherly interest or was it based on those old rivalries between the disciples about who was going to be the greatest? We don’t know but Jesus gives the reply: *"If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me."*

In other words, Jesus is saying “what I do with him is none of your business, yours is to follow Me!

Isn’t it so true that we so often are so preoccupied with other Christians that we forget about our own command to follow. You know. We are concerned to criticise others and are concerned with what they do, but we never look at ourselves to examine and reflect on whether we are following Him as we should.

The risen Christ is wanting us to live the risen life He’s given us, not someone else’s.

So what have we learned this evening?

The risen Christ brings newness of life and newness of relationships.

He brings us back into relationship with Him despite our failures
He commissions us to serve Him as He has called us
Our service is our responsibility

As we continue forward as a church let’s put aside past inadequacies and failures in our life which may be holding us back and go forward in His forgiveness and risen life to bring Him glory and extend His kingdom in the place He has called us.

