All In

# (John 21:1-17)

Over the past few weeks, we’ve been visiting with two travelers who encountered a mysterious stranger on a road to a small unknown town called Emmaus. We have walked with them on this 7-mile journey, we’ve eaten with them, and we’ve seen how Jesus didn’t give up on them even though they allowed their shattered expectations of the Messiah to cause them to give up on him. And yet, in spite of their shortcomings, Jesus tracked them down and that’s such good news, because he doesn’t give up on us either. In fact, there may be some of you listening today who are discouraged, you may feel like a failure because you’ve been trying to be faithful, you’ve been trying to serve God, but no matter how hard you try you just can’t seem to get it right and you’re beginning to wonder if you should even try.

Well, today I want to talk to you about another disciple who felt defeated and discouraged. The news of the empty tomb and the appearances of the risen Lord Jesus over the following days and weeks should have brought hope and joy. But for Peter, he didn’t really know how to process all this, because he’d made some bad decisions, he’d made some mistakes, and things didn’t turn out very well at all. And so, he had some important decisions to make, some choices that would affect not only his future, but the future of countless others.

Now, he didn’t know that then, but as he was contemplating what to do, he went back to his old ways, back to what was familiar, but Jesus didn’t give up on him. In fact, Jesus came looking for him and that is such good news for us today, because when we mess up, when we’re going the wrong direction, and doing the wrong thing he will chase us down too.

We’re going to pick up the story in John’s Gospel at chapter 21, where we find Peter and some other disciples hanging out, suddenly Peter announced,

*"I'm going out to fish," and they all said, "We'll go with you…" (John 21:3).*

This is the danger of leadership, Jesus had been teaching them to be fishers of men, but in an instant, the moment they took their eyes off of Jesus, they lost sight of their purpose and went back to what they knew. Peter said, “I’m going fishing and they said we’re all coming to.” They went back to what was familiar just like the proverb says,

*“As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his folly” (Proverbs 26:11).*

But God had called them to a better way, a higher way. He had called them out of the world, they were at the crossroads, before them was what was so familiar, but God had called them to come out, and to come away from what they knew. In the same way, many of us are at the crossroads and we too need to pause to consider God’s ways.

The Bible tells us in Jeremiah chapter 6,

*“This is what the Lord says: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls” (Jeremiah 6:16).*

You see, every now and then your wisdom is not going to get you where you want to go. And so, you’re going to have to listen to somebody else, somebody who knows a different way, someone who knows how to get you where you need to go, because the Bible tells us,

*“There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death” (Proverbs 16:25).*

And so, when you’re at the crossroads, when you’re at that place of indecision, you’ve got to stop and wait, you’ve got to wait for the signal, you’ve got to listen to somebody, and that somebody you want to listen to is the Holy Spirit.

The problem is that we don’t like waiting, for many of us traffic drives us crazy, it makes us impatient, because there are just so many people going in different directions. And yet, for many of us today, we’re at an intersection in life, some people are going the opposite direction, some are going left, and some are going right, but they’re not going where we need to go. This is precisely where the disciples were, this is where Peter was, they were at the crossroads, and like us they needed to follow God’s directions. They needed to follow his signal, trusting that he’s in control of the traffic flow, and so he tells us when it’s safe to go, that you can make a right turn now, or it’s time for you to come my way.

But Peter said, I’m going out fishing and the other disciples said we’ll go with you. Verse three tells us,

*“So, they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing” (John 21:3).*

In other words, they’re going their own way, they’re doing things their own way, but they caught nothing. And yet, they’re about to discover a better way, they’re going to listen to Jesus, they’re going to listen to the Word of God, and in an instant, everything is going to change for the better.

Some of you need to know that the thing that you’ve been working at, what you’ve been trying to do your own way and it hasn’t worked; the moment you listen to the Holy Spirit there will be breakthrough. Whatever you’ve been struggling with, whatever’s been held up, whatever’s been divided, whatever’s been confused is about to break free. I’ve been praying and believing that there is faith rising up in the church, that God is doing something in this season, and even though you may be stuck in your house what God is preparing to release can’t be contained by social distancing.

You see, the will of God is certain and even though Jacob wrestled with God, he refused to let a little limp keep him from the promise. The apostle Paul had a thorn in his side, but he refused to let a little pain stop him from obeying the will of God. And I believe there is someone listening who’s been working all night, but you’re going to get up in faith, you’re going to do what God said, and you’re going to press through that challenge, push through the discomfort, and you’re going to see a shift in your circumstances.

The Bible says that early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, and he called out to the disciples, *"Friends, have you caught any fish?" "No," they answered. He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish” (John 21:4-6).*

I wish there was someone listening, someone who had enough faith to believe that they don’t have enough room for what God is about to do. I wonder if there is anyone that has enough faith to get up and make some room, maybe move some furniture, move that coffee table, make room for what God is about to bring into your life. You see, some of you are just one decision, one prayer away from receiving what Paul describes as,

*“Immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to (God’s) power that is at work within us” (Ephesians 3:20).*

And so, it may be an increase in your anointing or your influence, but God is preparing to move when you walk by faith to places that require his presence. That’s what he told Joshua, *“I will give you every place where you set your foot…” (Joshua 1:3)* and so, we need the faith to step out into those places. In fact, I believe that there’s someone listening whose borders are about to expand because God responds to your faith.

Jabez cried out to God in first Chronicles, chapter 4, *"Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain." And God granted his request” (1 Chronicles 4:10).*

I hope somebody gets this, that somebody would throw their nets on the right side, that somebody would catch some faith today, because this Word is going to change your life. God said that the Word that goes forth from his mouth…

*“It shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11, NKJV).*

And so, I’m believing that somebody is about to go out with joy, somebody is going to break out in singing, because this is the Word of God.

In verse seven, John says, “It’s the Lord!" And as soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It’s the Lord," *he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water” (John 21:7).*

Now, I want you to pay special attention to what Peter did. The Bible says, he put on his jacket, his outer garment, and he jumped into the water. In other words, he didn’t strip down to his swim shorts and dive into the water, but he got dressed because he was getting ready to go for a walk on the waves.

I wonder if there are any of you who have seen God do it before and you know that he can do it again? Peter jumped out of the boat because he was ready to do it again, he knew that he had messed up before, but he wasn’t about to let Jesus down this time. He was committed, he was devoted, and zeal for the Lord consumed him. He was literally all in, with all of his heart, with all of his soul, with all of his mind, and with all of his strength.

*“The other disciples, in verse eight, “followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you’ve just caught” (John 21:8-10).*

Once again, Peter aiming to please Jesus, refusing to make the same mistakes he made before, obediently returned to the boat, climbs aboard *“…and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn” (John 21:11).*

Jesus blessed them immeasurably more than they could have even asked or imagined. John tells us that it was absurd, it was ridiculous, it was over the top, 153 large fish, and yet even with so many fish the net was not torn. In other words, the blessings of God’s abundance would break many people, they wouldn’t be able to handle it, but Jesus had spiritually positioned the disciples to receive this miracle and not to lose even one.

Then, in verse 12, Jesus said to them,

*“Come and have breakfast…” (John 21:12).*

Now, I want to rewind for a moment, because if you remember Peter was discouraged, he was defeated, because he’d denied Jesus, and so he was disconnected from the teacher, the one he’d followed for three years. But it wasn’t just Peter, John tells us that “None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” And so, none of them recognized him, but “they knew it was the Lord.” And yet, we’re going to discover that Peter is about to be singled out, because he’s going to have a necessary but uncomfortable conversation with Jesus. He’s at the crossroads in his life, he sitting at the intersection, there are multiple paths, but really only one choice, and he couldn’t move until he had this conversation.

Jesus invites him to “Come and have breakfast” and Peter is going to have to confront what he’s been running from. You see, he’s standing on the shore with the resurrected Jesus, the one who had taught him what it means in Deuteronomy chapter six, verse five, to…

*“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30).*

And so, right there in front of him was the Lord, the man he’d walked with for three years, the one that he’d so boldly professed,

*“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16).*

And yet, Peter who said, “I’m ready to go with you to prison and even to death” found that his commitment to stand by Jesus, to love him with all of his heart, soul, mind, and strength was just not all that he professed it to be. And just before Jesus died a brutal death on the cross, instead of being there for Jesus, instead of being all in, he actually denied knowing him three times. And so, Peter’s wrestling with the pain of knowing that his love had fallen short, that he had messed up, and that drove him to get to Jesus, even if he had to swim.

You see, this was his opportunity, because he never had the chance to say I’m sorry, and there may be some of you listening today who have denied Jesus too. Maybe you’ve denied him by the things that you said or by the things that you’ve done but let me encourage you not to wait until your standing face-to-face with Jesus on the last day. This is your opportunity to say I’m sorry, because you know what you did, you know how bad it was, and you know that it took Jesus dying and shedding his blood to save you. You know what he’s delivered you from, you know the hell he’s kept you from, and that’s why you praise him like you do. That’s why we worship him the way we do, because he rescued us when we had nowhere else to turn but to him.

You see, like Peter, we’ve all claimed to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and yet we’ve all fallen short of our boasts. In spite of our weaknesses and our failures, the Bible says,

*“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).*

And that’s what’s so amazing about this story, that just like Jesus chased down Peter and the disciples after they went fishing, just like he chased down those two disciples on the road to Emmaus, Jesus chases us down, rescuing us, when we had nothing to offer him, we couldn’t do anything good or bad. And in verse 13, suddenly we find ourselves once again in a familiar situation,

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

Once again, we find the bread of life tracking down his discouraged disciples, reminding them that he would never leave them nor forsake them, breaking bread with them and encouraging them, letting them know that he’s not finished with them yet. And even though they’d turned away from the promise of God, the promise remained, and he revealed himself to them again and again. The Bible tells us,

*“This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead” (John 21:14).*

In other words, Jesus wasn’t about to give up on them now. He’d invested three years in them, he given his life for them, and he was going to make sure that they got it right.

This is such good news because sometimes we find ourselves in that place where we’ve messed up again, we’re ashamed and maybe we don’t even want to talk about it, let alone ask for forgiveness. But Jesus is not content to leave us there, hiding in the garden, hiding behind fig leaves, ashamed because of our sin. You see, that was never part of his plan and there’s nothing that he won’t forgive if you confess it and repent of it.

In verse 15, Jesus is up to something, he’s about to have this conversation with Peter. Now, Peter is at the crossroads, there are many paths, but really only one choice, and when they had finished eating, Jesus said,

*“Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs” (John 21:15).*

Again, in verse 16, *Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep” (John 21:16).*

The third time, in verse 17, *Jesus said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. (John 21:17).*

Now, it may seem as if Jesus is saying the same thing three times, but he transitions from saying feed my lambs, to care for my sheep, and then to feed my sheep. In other words, Jesus is talking about both physical food and nourishment; he’s telling Peter to walk with his lambs, discipling them from infancy all the way to maturity. And that’s so beautiful because sometimes we don’t get it right, we don’t always do everything perfectly, and so we need grace while we’re learning.

That’s exactly what Jesus modeled here with Peter, he gave him grace and said, “Peter, if you love me with all of your heart, all of your soul, all of your mind, and all of your strength, put down your nets and feed my sheep. If you are all in, if you’re committed to me, care for my lambs and walk with them until they are mature.” Peter was at the crossroads, he had a choice, and he made the right decision. He chose to be all in and he ran the course. Peter served God’s purposes to the very end and before he was crucified, before he died a martyr’s death, he wrote this to the church:

*“The end of all things is near. Therefore, be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 4:7-11).*

I want to assure you today that COVID-19 isn’t a season that we’re just trying to get through, but this is a season that we’re maximizing. My prayer is that you would be all in, that you would get in the game and make a difference wherever you are, loving God with all of your heart, mind, soul, and strength, taking care of God’s children, encouraging the sheep, and serving your brothers and sisters in Christ.

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May 03, 2020

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*Graphics, notes, and commentary from LifeChurch, Ministry Pass, PC Study Bible, Preaching Library, and Sermon Central. Scripture from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.*