

FOLLOW ME

John 21:1-22 for two readers, with commentary by Verna Kwiatkowski.
Easter meditation.

John's gospel concludes with an interesting and instructive account of the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection.

1 – Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

2 – Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you 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.

1 – Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples 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.

2 – Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

1 – When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

2 – Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

1 – The third time he 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. Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me."

2 – Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus

answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me."

Comments: I love this story that begins with Peter's announcement: "I'm going fishing!" and ends with Jesus saying to Peter, in effect: "Never mind about him! YOU follow ME!"

My comments contain a lot of questions such as: What did Jesus mean when he said to Peter, "Do you truly love me more than these?" These *what?* Surely NOT "these other six disciples who are here with you"! Peter had learned from experience that people can't know for sure the depth of their OWN devotion to Jesus, much less someone else's! I believe Jesus was saying, "Do you love me more than you love these fish, the 153 large fish that you enjoyed counting, amazed that the net had not broken? Are you willing to leave the whole industry of fishing for fish, as you did when I first invited you to follow me?" Peter answered simply: "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." And then Jesus gave him an assignment: "Feed my lambs and sheep."

After commissioning Peter, Jesus let him know that an execution would eventually end his earthly life. There was no doubt that life went on after death, for wasn't it a resurrected Jesus who was talking with them and preparing breakfast for them on the beach? He had been dead, but now was obviously alive. How comforting that must have been, especially as they considered their own deaths!

Just then Peter noticed John, and asked: "Lord, what about him?" We ourselves need to learn from the answer Jesus gave, which I will paraphrase: "Never mind what plans I have for others. Keep your eyes on ME as you go where I lead." All people are invited to believe in Jesus, for, as John says elsewhere in his gospel, "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." To those who believe in him, Jesus gives the call to follow him; to become his disciples; to get in on the Kingdom work that we are assigned to do. This call may come several times in a person's life, as with Peter, and each time we must decide how we will respond, even if he reveals the kind of death by which we will glorify God. Although the assignments differ – because WE differ in many ways – the Lord ALWAYS leads us in paths of righteousness, for our good, as well as for HIS name's sake.

Invitation: Perhaps the risen Christ is calling to you today, either to believe in him, or to follow him. What better day to respond positively to his call than the day we celebrate his resurrection?

Amen.

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Verna Kwiatkowski

www.vernakwiatkowski.com