

The Jesus Who Shows Up

John 21:1-14

For the disciples, the last several days have been emotionally uplifting and yet draining at the same time. First, there was the arrest, trial and crucifixion of Jesus, and all the events leading up to it. There were the hours of darkness and apparent uncertainty just after Jesus died. There was that glorious moment when they realized that Jesus had been raised from the dead, just as He said He would be! How does a human brain process all that in only a few hours?

Now the disciples have seen Jesus several times. He didn't just conquer death and then come and hang out with His disciples as before. They didn't just pick up where they left off, with Jesus teaching and healing and traveling about. He would appear in front of them, and then He was gone. Perhaps He didn't want them to get too used to having Him physically present with them. But the disciples seem to be hovering in a neutral zone, as if they really don't know what to do next.

We don't have any idea how long they waited. John simply says in 21:1, "*Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples.*" That could be any period of time. Perhaps Jesus gave them some time to think things through, to mull it over, because they were about to embark on a life-transforming, world-changing, history-altering mission—telling the world that God has revealed Himself to us through His Son Jesus.

One day Peter decides it's time to do something, *anything*. The waiting is driving him crazy. Perhaps if he can catch a few fish, he'll feel better. Perhaps if he can return to something a little more comfortable, something he was used to doing, he could get his mind off things for a while. Some might say that Peter was giving up his life of following Christ, that he was returning to fishing as a profession. Others say he was just trying to pass the time. Whatever, it was obvious that Peter and the other six who were with him did what was right in their own eyes.

Verse three tells us that they worked all night, but caught nothing. In Luke 5 there had been a similar experience at the beginning of their life with Jesus. Here they are again, in the same situation as before. It was just a further reminder to them—and to us!—that apart from Jesus we can do nothing, as we read in chapter fifteen of this same gospel. In fact, throughout the gospels, the disciples do not catch a single fish without the help of Jesus. You get the idea He was steering them away from their comfort zones! But for now, at least, the disciples return to what they knew.

The first century Jewish historian Josephus wrote that in that time the Sea of Galilee was known for its abundant fish population. The fishing was so good, he said, that there were 230 different commercial fishing boats working the lake at one time. There were plenty of fish. So it is very

surprising that we read in verse three that this group of seven professional fishermen worked all night, yet caught nothing. One commentator remarked “*Unless I am utterly mistaken, the first miracle was that Jesus Christ all night long deliberately kept every fish in Galilee out of their nets.*” (Geoffrey King)

There may be something to that. It is very possible, and we might even say very likely, that sometimes God withholds blessings from our lives because He is turning our hearts back to Himself.

Now Jesus tells them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat, and when they do, the nets are instantly full of large fish! This was a pretty impressive miracle! And here was the Resurrected Christ, One who had been beaten and flogged, One who had been paraded through the streets carrying His own cross, One who had died a horrible, excruciating death nailed to a cross—standing on the shore! An astounding miracle!

One of the most amazing things of all on that particular morning was that Jesus showed up! Keep it in perspective: the disciples had run from Him when He was arrested, afraid for their own lives. When backed into a corner by a young girl, Peter denied even knowing Him. John was the only one of the twelve disciples who was even present when Jesus died.

It was to *those* disciples that Jesus appeared. These men who had betrayed Him and disowned Him and denied Him and mocked Him—those were the ones Jesus appeared to. But it was not a chance meeting! They didn’t stumble into each other. This was not one of those awkward moments we’re all found ourselves in, where we accidentally run into someone we’re rather not have to talk to. Why were the disciples there? In John 20 they are in Jerusalem, hiding from fear of the Jews. At the beginning of John 21, they are in Galilee, sixty miles away, getting ready to go fishing again. Why?

When Matthew tells the Resurrection Story, he tells us that an angel told Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, “*He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.*” (28:6-7) So the disciples were in Galilee, waiting for Jesus, waiting for Him to reveal Himself to them.

But they weren’t *exactly* where they were supposed to be! Later in that same chapter in Matthew 28, we read, “*Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the **mountain** where Jesus had told them to go.*” So they were in Galilee, but not on the mountain. They had made the trip, but somewhere along the way, got distracted, or discouraged, or impatient. They were in the general vicinity of where Jesus told them to be, but they still weren’t in the right place.

How like them we are sometimes! God tells us to do something, and we start out in the general direction of obedience. But somewhere along the way we take a shortcut, or try to run ahead of God, or doubt Him, or grow impatient with Him. There may be nothing wrong with what we do instead, except that it is not what God tells us to do.

And even though they weren't where Jesus told them to be, Jesus still found them, and came to them. More than that, He "revealed Himself" to them! Pay attention to this—this is what the Gospel is all about! It wasn't that Jesus just went where they were. It wasn't that Jesus knew they were out on the water and just decided to go to the same stretch of beach so they could have breakfast together. Jesus went where they were because reconciliation needed to happen! A more accurate translation of John 21:1 reads "*After this, Jesus **revealed** Himself again to His disciples by the Sea of Tiberias. He **revealed** Himself in this way:*"

You've got to see this! The words that John uses shows us something very important about how Almighty God has pulled back the curtain so we can know Him. The word for "revealed" in verse one is used almost exclusively in the New Testament to describe something God does to show Himself to us. It is a word used to describe something that has always been there, but which we could not see before. It's similar to the way light is filled with colors, but we don't see what is always there until that light passes through a prism. The New Testament uses the word to describe the works of Christ, His redemptive work in dying for our sins, His second coming, His glory, His manifestation of Himself to mankind, His righteousness, His love. And it is the word John uses here to say that Jesus "showed up," that He revealed Himself to His disciples after His Resurrection.

Take a closer look at this story. When you examine who these men were who were in that boat, you begin to see why it was such an amazing thing that the Risen Christ revealed Himself—to them of all people! John 21:2 tells us that there were seven disciples there in that boat. There were Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, Zebedee's sons (whom we know to be James and John) and two others who are not named. We can go back to John 1 and speculate that these two were Andrew and Philip because they were with James and John and Peter and Nathanael—all of them from the same area and all of them fishermen. We can look at that group of disciples who went fishing, and we realize that it was a very real miracle that Jesus would even have anything to do with them. And when we look closely at the men in the boat, we just might see our own faces there. If we're honest with ourselves for only a few seconds, we would see that it's a real miracle Jesus would have anything to do with us! But He does!

1 Today, Jesus shows up even when we mock Him.

This would have been Nathanael. Back in John 1, we read Philip found Nathanael and told him, "*We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.*" Nathanael's reply was laced

with scorn: *“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?”*

What was the reason for Nathanael’s mockery? Nathanael had never met Jesus, yet he was mocking Him. Why? It had everything to do with where Jesus was from. Nazareth was isolated from other towns, and was not considered to be an important part of the religious or political life of Israel. It’s not even mentioned in the Old Testament. Nazareth also had a bad reputation when it came to its morals and lack of culture. During the time of Jesus, the village may have had as few as one hundred people living there. Some scholars believe people from there had an accent that caused others to look down on them. Nazareth was on the wrong side of the tracks! So it was small, out of the way, unimportant, uncultured and immoral.

Nathanael was from Cana in Galilee, a pretty small place itself! How ironic it is that Nathanael’s prejudice would prevent him from seeing his own humble beginnings! When Philip told him that they had found the Messiah, Nathanael’s response was based purely on his own prejudices and preconceived notions. Look long and hard into the face of Nathanael, and see if you recognize yourself there. How often do we choose to accept or reject a person because of where they are from, what they sound like or some other superficial criteria?

The mockery of Jesus continues to this day. We are living in a day when the very existence of Jesus is being questioned or mocked. Some realize they cannot totally eliminate Jesus, so they have attempted to remake Him into something He never was. This teaching denies that Jesus is God. There are many others. You don’t really need me to go into too much detail on this point, as we all know how the world thumbs its nose at God. And like Nathanael at the beginning, the mockery is based on mis-information and prejudice. John asked in his first letter, *“Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the anti-Christ, he who denies the Father and the Son.”* (1 John 2)

If you are among those who have scoffed at Jesus and what He teaches, Jesus reveals Himself to you. You may even claim to be a follower of His, yet your thoughts and lifestyles have made a mockery of the sacrifice He paid for you. And yet Jesus shows up! He comes to your beach and calls you to Himself. Jesus is even now reaching out to you, to bring you back to Himself. It’s not so He can control you or add a notch to His belt. It is for the same reason He died in the first place—He loves you!

2 Today, Jesus shows up even when we doubt Him.

This would have been Thomas. We know his story, don’t we? In the chapter just before this one, the disciples were huddled together behind locked doors, afraid for their lives. They were all there, except for Judas, who had killed himself, and Thomas, who was

absent for unnamed reasons. Jesus suddenly was there among them, and said, *“Peace be with you!”* a typical Jewish greeting. John tells us that *“The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.”*

As soon as the others saw Thomas, they told him, *“We have seen the Lord!”* But Thomas didn’t believe it. He had to have some proof he could touch—he said he wouldn’t even trust his own eyes! *“Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.”* The rest of the story is that one week later the disciples were together again, and Thomas was with them this time. The doors were again locked, and suddenly Jesus was there with them! Jesus immediately answers Thomas’ doubts: *“Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”*

When Peter said he was going fishing, Thomas was among those who said they were going with him. He didn’t want to miss anything this time around! Look long and hard into the face of Thomas—do you see yourself? You may not have doubted Christ the same way Thomas did, but have you doubted the words of God at any point in your life? You may have failed to believe the words of promise and healing and comfort and presence—and now you find yourself in the boat with Thomas.

Or you may have refused to believe the claims of Christ on your soul. You have doubted His love and care and concern and involvement in your life. You have wondered where He is when you’ve been in such fear and pain. You have doubted the words of Scripture about your eternal destiny and the importance of following Christ with your whole heart and life.

Here’s the good news: today, Jesus shows up for you! Your doubts have not hurt Him one bit, and He stands on your shore calling out to you to come to Him. Your doubts have kept you from experiencing the love and grace and mercy of Jesus, and it is time for the curtain to be pulled back, and for you to see the reality of the love of Jesus for you that has always been there.

3 Today, Jesus shows up even when we deny Him.

And this would be Peter! We know the story: Peter claimed he would never turn away from Christ, to which Jesus replied that Peter would indeed deny knowing Him a total of three times before the next morning came. And that is exactly what happened. Peter has seen Jesus at least two times by the time they fish all night without catching anything. But when Jesus told them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat, and after they caught all those fish, and when John whispered in breathless wonder, “It is the Lord!” Peter jumped into the water to swim to shore. Even the guilt and shame of his denial would not keep him from being close to Jesus.

Have you denied Jesus? Have I? Of course! We have denied Jesus in so many ways and in so many situations that we have no right or reason to stand in judgment on Peter! We have denied Him in the choices we've made, and the places we've been, and the things we've done. We have denied Him in our disobedience and in our sinful apathetic attitudes about anything having to do with the Christian life. We have denied Him when we have lusted and gossiped and cheated and lied and despised others. We have denied Him every time we have taken our commitments to Christ lightly, or not followed through on them. There's not one of us who has not done this—perhaps you're engaged in it right now.

Yet even for *us* there is hope! Even to us, Jesus reveals Himself. Today, Jesus shows up. Today, Jesus reveals Himself to you on the shore of your life, calling to you, that even though you have denied Him, He still loves you and wants you to be His. It's not because He's a pushover, or that what you have done doesn't really matter to Him. It's because He loves you.

4 Today, Jesus shows up when we love Him.

This would be John. He's in the boat with the others. John is the first to recognize Jesus standing on the shore. In fact, we read in John 20:8 that John was the first to believe in the resurrection. John had occupied the privileged place of intimacy right next to Jesus at the Last Supper. He was there at the cross when Jesus died, and He, with Peter, was one of the first visitors to the empty tomb.

Here, they were about a hundred yards offshore, and the sun was not fully risen in the sky. There may have been a fog or mist on the water—there are any number of reasons why the others may not have recognized Jesus. But when Jesus tells them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat, and when the nets are instantly filled with fish, John puts this together with what had happened earlier when Jesus told them where to catch the fish. John is the one who breathes out, "*It is the Lord!*"

John, along with his brother James, had left their fishing nets and boats with their father Zebedee to follow Jesus. The two brothers sometimes struggled with understanding what Jesus was about and how to best follow Him. But they stayed with Him and followed Him as best they could.

It is a peculiar characteristic of the Gospel of John that he never mentions himself by name. At least six times in his gospel he calls himself, "*The disciple whom Jesus loved.*" That doesn't mean Jesus loved him more than anyone else; it's simply that John knew what it was like to be loved by Jesus, and he loved Jesus in return. At the beginning of their time with Jesus he and his brother James were known as "Sons of Thunder," because of their tempers. Now we know him as "The Apostle of Love." Just look at how Jesus can change a person!

John tells that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. John is the one who quotes Jesus when He said, *“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”* John went on to write later in his life: *“Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God”* (1 John 4:7-8).

Do you love Him? Has He become for you the source of your life and your very reason for living, the foundation of your hope, the basis for your peace? Easter is not about chocolates or bunnies or having great meals together with family and friends. It’s not even about feeling sorry for Jesus Who died. It’s about God keeping His promise, about Jesus triumphing over sin and rebellion of people. It’s about God showing His righteousness to the world. It’s about God showing immeasurable grace to us, who deserve it the least.

This day is much more than eating sweets and celebrating Spring. It’s about the Eternal Christ, and you must deal with Him. Don’t just say you believe in God. Don’t just say you believe in Jesus Who saves. Don’t just say you believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus. In the end, believing about facts isn’t enough. The real question is, *“Do you love Jesus?”* (adapted from Timothy Wonil Lee, <http://timundergod.blogspot.com>)

*Wonderful the matchless grace of Jesus,
Deeper than the mighty rolling sea;
Higher than the mountain, sparkling like a fountain,
All sufficient grace for even me!
Broader than the scope of my transgressions,
Greater far than all my sin and shame.
O magnify the precious name of Jesus,
Praise His name!
--Haldor Lillenas*

This is the Jesus who shows up. This is the Jesus who shows up for you today. When we mock Him, or doubt Him, or deny Him, or love Him, He shows up. Will you come to shore and fellowship with Him?