

Sunday, June 5, 2022

# Staying Around; Moving Out

(The Mission of "Commissioning")

(Series: "From Meetings to Mission")

(Message Seven)

(John 21:18-25)

## Scripture

*<sup>18</sup>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." <sup>19</sup>Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"*

*<sup>20</sup>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?") <sup>21</sup>When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?"*

*<sup>22</sup>Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." <sup>23</sup>Because of this, the rumor spread among the believers 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?"*

*<sup>24</sup>This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.*

*<sup>25</sup>Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.*

## Message

**Picture John at his writing desk. He's just finishing writing this amazingly Spirit inspired Gospel.**

Reading and studying this book, we have found ourselves in the company of Jesus who uses John's words and the Spirit's presence to bring life and purpose to our lives. We have found ourselves in the scenes, conversations, and meetings with Jesus; we have come to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, the

Son of God; and have joined the disciples who are committed to “following him” through thick and thin, wherever he leads.

One of the misunderstandings that often develops among people (like us) who have tried to follow Jesus for a long time, is that the spiritual world becomes separate from the ordinary, *real* world where we must make a living and raise our children.

It becomes a struggle to keep our minds on God when we have taxes to pay and diapers to change. It is hard to sing, “This Is My Father’s World” in a COVID pandemic, or “Our God Reigns” while children are being killed in our schools.

John will have none of that. He reminds us Jesus became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood and lived with us amid our messes.

John uses words a five-year-old can understand - light, bread, door, water, wind – to remind us that Jesus invites us deeper into this world, that Jesus is not inviting us to run for the hills, that Jesus wants us to engage this world as he engaged this world.

As John writes this incredible story that culminates in Jesus’ death and resurrection, he shows us a Jesus helping with wedding wine, consoling loved ones, going to church, and cooking breakfast on the shore.

**After writing of Jesus’ “*meetings*” with Mary of Magdala, the disciples, and Thomas, John tells us that Jesus *commissions* his followers, saying, “*As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.*” (20:21)**

Then John concludes his Gospel, his epilogue, with three stories featuring the Apostle Peter. The first, which we considered two weeks ago, takes place on a beach in Galilee where Jesus, through a miraculous catch, reminds his followers they are to be fishers, i.e., **catchers**, of people. The second story, which we reflected on last Sunday, takes place after breakfast, when Jesus **cares** for Peter’s soul and asks Peter if he loves Jesus three times and restores him to continue Christ’s mission. The third story, for our consideration this morning, takes place as Jesus **commissions** Peter with a final “*Follow me.*”

So, why Peter? John wants us to understand how this glorious resurrection life is to be lived out in **everyday life** in the streets and marketplaces by people like us: butchers, bakers, and candlestick makers.

We don’t wait until we die to experience and participate in the resurrection life. We start immediately in our own neighborhood, in our workplace, at our school with the people we have grown up with, live with, and work with.

## **THE WORDS TO PETER**

**So far in this twenty-first chapter, Jesus has offered three “**words**” to Peter.**

His **first** word was, “*Peter, do you love me more than these other disciples?*” “*Feed my lambs.*” His **second** word was similar: “*Peter, do you love me?*” “*Shepherd my sheep.*” And then a **third** word was just like the first two: “*Peter, do you love me?*” “*Feed my Sheep.*” Jesus was restoring Peter and reminding the Church and its leaders of the eternal importance of “loving Jesus.”

**In John 21:18-19a, Jesus offers **fourth** word to Peter, a solemn word, “*Amen, amen, I want to tell you something very important.*”**

The last time Jesus used this phrase, “*Very, truly*” (literally, “*Amen-Amen*”), with Peter was when he predicted Peter’s three-fold denial (**John 13:38**).

Now Jesus is again predicting something ominous: “*When you are old, you will stretch out your hands.*” “*Peter, life will be **hard**; your death will be **painful**.*” (**21:18**)

Jesus is telling Peter not to have any illusions about what is coming; following Jesus will not like marching in a victory parade. John writes that what Jesus said indicates the kind of death Peter will die – the kind of death where his arms are stretched out – a crucifixion.

Peter has often tried to follow Jesus in his own way. He still doesn’t quite get it, but he will. And then Jesus tells Peter that his coming **martyrdom**, suffering and pain, will **glorify** God.

In doing so, Jesus reminds us again, the way to glory in his Father’s Kingdom is not upward but downward – for Jesus...and for all his disciples (cf. **Phil. 2:4-6**). Jesus reminds us again, the way to glory in God’s Kingdom always involves a cross – pain and suffering – for Jesus...and for all his disciples (cf. **Luke 9:23**).

But why would Jesus give this discouraging **prophecy** to Peter just after he has been restored and just before Jesus leaves?

Maybe to teach Peter (and all future disciples) that discipleship is neither a rose garden nor a triumphant blitzkrieg. Following Jesus entails suffering, **persecution**, the world’s hate, and some level of giving up one’s life.

We remember the end of Jesus forerunner, John the Baptist (**Matthew 11**). We remember the end of the Apostle Paul’s ministry in Rome (**Acts 28f**).

It’s not about doing what Jesus wants and what I want; it is just about what Jesus wants. It’s not a bit of “suffering” for Jesus and the “good life” for me most of the time. It is all about Jesus. Paul writes, “*Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*” (**2 Timothy 3:12**)

Maybe because it is kinder and wiser for Jesus to share the **hard parts** with Peter than to underscore his missional **successes**. (153 suggests much success!).

Maybe so when Peter is faced with martyrdom, he won't wonder, "Is this **payback** for when I denied and disappointed Jesus?"

This is a hard prophecy to hear; Jesus cushions it slightly by saying it will bring glory to God. But Jesus wants us to know that it is the way we "lose" – even more than the way we "win" – that gives the Gospel credibility and brings glory to God. Remember the cross.

This fourth word is a masterful commissioning (ordination) service in the best sense of "master-ful." Peter (and all Jesus' disciples) here reminded that a cross accompanies his mission.

**Jesus then offers Peter a **fifth** word: "Then he [Jesus] said to him [Peter], 'Follow me!'"**

Jesus doesn't say, "Lead in my name" or "Lead my flock" or even, "Strive to be a leader in my Church!" Jesus says as clearly, simply, briefly, and emphatically as possible, "*Follow me.*" Stay with the basics! It is the main thing!

Don't miss who is saying these words: Jesus - the one **crucified** (martyred) and now **risen** (conquering) Lord! And he is saying, "I came through the suffering and death of a cross, Peter; you will too, just follow me!" Stay close. Keep your eyes fixed on me. Jesus' words acknowledge Peter's and our sufferings and death; they acknowledge Peter's and our resurrection and victory.

Jesus knows we (i.e., every disciple) need to be a **follower** before we can be a **leader** (i.e., pastor, teacher, missionary, elder, witness, etc.) and we can only be an effective leader as long as we continue to be a dedicated follower. If we cease to follow Jesus, he can't use us to build his Church or Kingdom.

**Peter looks over his shoulder and sees John and asks Jesus, "What about him?"** "*Is John also going to end up a tired old man and glorify God in his death?*" (20:21) (Classic Peter; forgiven, restored, commissioned...but there is still work to do!)

Jesus' **sixth** word, a **rebuke**, is sharp: "*That is not your business—you follow me!*"

Following Jesus demands our (each disciple's) full attention. There is no **time** or **benefit** to speculate on or compare ourselves to how others are doing. We are to keep our eyes solely on Jesus. (John 21:22) The minute we start making comparisons, we lose our focused obedience on Jesus' words and life for us. Each one of us is uniquely gifted and called.

We can't be concerned with another person's assignment; we must be fully focused on our own calling. (You know what your assignment is, right?)

Nothing good happens when we compare and compete. God does not judge us according to the talents and abilities of others but according to the talents and abilities he has given us.

God call us to be faithful to what he has **called** and **gifted** us to be and do. We are not responsible for the giving of our gift(s) – only for how we use them. We must move forward in faith. Find our lot in life. Be who God called us to be.

The Christian life is **not** about **doing** great things for God but in allowing Jesus to **use us** in our weaknesses and failures and rehabilitate us through his grace and love so we can represent him on his mission.

The Christian life is not about being a great leader but a great follower; not about becoming more and more but less and less; not about drawing attention to ourselves or our way but to Jesus and his way.

Jesus' **last** word, of these seven last words to Peter, reflects his first words to Peter: "*You must **follow** me!*" (**Matt 4:19**). The call of Jesus to his fallen world doesn't change.

## THE WORD ABOUT JOHN

Jesus' statement to Peter, "*If I want him (John) to **remain alive** until I **return**...*" messed up many early disciples who took it literally and believed Jesus would return before John died. The early Church understood Jesus' return was imminent. (cf., **Mark 9:1**; **Matt. 24:34-35**, etc.) Then John died. This resulted in confusion and trauma. People have been interested in determining the time of Jesus' return ever since.

While we may be a bit bewildered by the apparent "long delay" after Jesus seemed to imply his return was coming quickly, Jesus repeatedly reminded his disciples before he ascended that "*It is not for you disciples to know the times or seasons...*" (**Acts 1:7**)

That disqualification is followed by this qualification: "*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth.*" (**Acts 1:8**) We don't know when Jesus will return; we're not supposed to know (even Jesus doesn't know), nor are we to be distracted by it. We're to have a sense of urgency to make disciples and build Christ's Church here and now. Followers of Jesus are to focus on being world missionaries, not end-time visionaries.

John's calling or gift noted here is "**abiding**." (The NIV uses, "remaining," - a word Jesus uses in **John 15** and here in 21:22,23 and in fifteen other places in John.)

John is traditionally known as the disciple who lived the longest and the only disciple who wasn't martyred. His "abiding" has a **chronological** component.

John faithfully penned this Gospel, faithful scripture, which has now "abided," remained, for over two thousand years. He was "*bearing witness*" and "*writing these things down*." His abiding has a **missional** component.

John identifies himself as "*the disciple whom Jesus loved*," (21:20) the one who reclined next to Jesus (13:23) at the Last Supper. His "abiding" has a deeply **relational** component.

"**Abiding**," *staying around, staying close* to Jesus is in addition to doing the things Jesus tells us to do, essential to "**following**." Peter is "called" to **action**; John to **abiding**; Peter to faithful **shepherding**, John to faithful **teaching** (thru his Gospel writing); Peter to martyrdom, John to persevering; Peter to boldness, John to reflection. Both disciples were faithful to their calling.

The call of John is neither **superior** nor **inferior** to Peter's calling, just different. It is these two functions, not the two persons, that are significant for the Church. It is the faithfulness to fulfilling the mission that is significant for disciples.

The Church needs Peters and Johns in leadership, on mission, and in service. The Church needs active and contemplative discipleship, proclaiming and writing, pastoring and pondering, Marthas and Marys, being in the study and being in the marketplace, evangelist-pastors and evangelist-teachers. The Church needs the gifts God **entrusted** to **you**!

## SUMMARY

### Step One to being a Disciple: **Love God**.

"Simon, son of John, do you love me..." "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" When we've failed to be the person God has called us to be, and we want to follow Jesus, the first step is to declare our love for him over and over and over.

### Step Two to being a Disciple: (Fish for and) **Feed My Sheep** (people).

Jesus responds to each one of Peter's declarations of love with, "*tend my lambs*" and "*feed my sheep*." Sin and failure is always communal; restoration is always communal; teaching the Word of God is always communal. Our lives are a display of God's grace and forgiveness.

### Step Three to being a Disciple: Prepare to **Die Well** (Woe! What?!)

If we **live** well, we can **die** well. John 21:18 is Jesus' statement about Peter's dying.



Tradition says Peter was sentenced to be crucified, but didn't want to die like his Lord so he was crucified upside down – a mark of humility.

John writes that Jesus told Peter his death would be of such significance it would glorify God... like Jesus' death did. What did Jesus do when he died on the cross? He brought glory to his Father. Impetuous Peter, for all of his gaffes and failures, would follow Jesus so well that even in his death he would glorify God. That is an amazing testimony.

God is more interested in **where** we are **going** than in where we have **been**; **forgiven** and **following** Jesus, we (anyone, everyone) can bring **glory** to God.

**John 21 is not the end. It could have been, but it's not.** In fact, it is just the **beginning**. The end of John's **Gospel** leads directly into *The Acts of the Apostles*.

John writes his Gospel so that *"you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name."* (**John 20:21**) Luke writes Acts to show what happens when "believers" *"receive power when the Holy Spirit comes"* and they become his witnesses where they go. (**Acts 1:8**)

Following Jesus requires **staying around** (abiding) with Jesus and **moving on** wherever he leads: coming to worship, then moving out into his world. Belief is not belief until we act on it. Following does not mean standing still.

Every time the Good News, the **Gospel** (of John), enters your heart, it must turn into **Acts**; Gospel embraced always leads to Acts done. And our **Acts** must always begin with **Gospel**. The things we do in life, should never be self-focused, but always God-honoring. All our Acts must be birthed in the Good News.

The **Holy Spirit**, given on Pentecost, means the Gospel of love must **produce** Acts of love. The gospel of mercy will (must) produce Acts of mercy. The gospel of resurrection will (must) produce Acts of resurrection. Witnessing Jesus' death and resurrection makes us witnesses wherever we are and in whatever we are doing.

**May God bless your life with his presence and his Spirit's power.** May you dwell in the grace of the cross, the hope of the empty tomb, the assurance of restoration, and power of his Holy Spirit. But most of all, may you believe that God is your ever-present help. And having "met" with him, may you "follow him," may you Act on "mission."

Prayer:

*Father, thank you for raising Jesus from the dead and for providing us a future in the middle of our guilt, our grieving, our pain, and our life's messes.*

*Thank you for the miracles you do in our life, for your daily provision, and for your willingness to forgive our failures. Thank you for restoring our heart and soul. Thank you for using us, even in our brokenness, to care for each other, for the marginalized, the weakest, and the most vulnerable.*

*Father, make us shepherds actively pursuing Acts of obedience and fully abiding in you as we follow Jesus on mission to build his Church.*

*In the name of the risen Christ, Amen.*

Dr. Douglas Kamstra  
Covenant CRC  
7171 Willard Ave. SE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49548