

# Could We Start Again?

A Backwards Sermon for the Second Sunday of Easter

John 21: 3-14

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Last Sunday, did you watch *Jesus Christ Superstar*? We did at our house and judging from my conversations this past week we were not alone. Many of us have the plot and score memorized. Perhaps because we see ourselves in them, a favorite song of many who love *Superstar* is a duet sung by Mary Magdalene and Peter. These two verses could be a prayer for many a *Superstar* fan.

... I've been hopeful so far  
Now for the first time I think we're going wrong  
Hurry up and tell me, this is all a dream  
Or could we start again please?

... I think you've made your point now  
You've even gone a bit too far to get your message home  
Before it gets too frightening, we ought to call a halt  
... So could we start again please?<sup>ii</sup>

At some time or another, we all feel like Mary and Peter at times in our walk with Christ. In moments of terror and death, such as what Peter and Mary were facing with Jesus' arrest, we want whatever the terror is to pass. In contrast we also have moments of profound joy, such as Mary meeting the risen Christ, that we never want to end. But one great truth is that whether whatever "it" is terror or joy, "it" came to pass. Nothing in life is permanent. All of life comes to pass.

Part of the Good News of Christ's resurrection is not simply that it came to pass, but because Christ's resurrection came all humanity now has the opportunity to start again. In the flow of human existence there are many opportunities to start again. This seven Sunday celebration of Christ's resurrection as snow melts and daffodils sprout is a season where we celebrate starting again.

In Christian understanding, when Christ rose in glory was the single act that empowered all of creation to start again. In that one act Christ began reversing the impact of sin that led to our ancestors' exile from Eden. (Genesis 3) The ark of human folly reached its zenith in Christ's crucifixion. With his resurrection human redemption began its snowball run to God's garden at the end of all time. Seriously, read Revelation 22:1-6. There John described a beautiful garden is anchored by a river flowing from God and the lamb through an orchard of the tree of life. At the end of time, Eden is restored.

This isn't a message you will get from *Superstar*. As young men raised in the Church of England, composer Andrew Lloyd Weber and lyricist Tim Rice were primarily looking at Jesus from Judas Iscariot's point of view when they composed *Superstar*.<sup>iii</sup> Christ is seen as Judas saw him. Mary and Peter as seen as Judas saw them. Judas saw no possibility of starting again. His depression was so profound that Judas chose to end his life while Jesus was dying on the cross. Judas did not see Jesus start again.

But that was not true for either Mary or Peter. They did start again.

To hear of their new starts, one needs to turn to the several resurrection stories in the Gospels. John's eyewitness accounts are among the Church's favorites. Although the first one had to come from Mary who must have told John.

After she found the empty tomb with the other Mary and Salome, in her moment of fear Mary Magdalen had the first conversation with the risen Christ. (John 20:11-18) In that moment when she recognized the glorified Christ as he called her by name, human redemption started a new trajectory to God's grace. At Christ's command Mary went and told the apostles including Peter, John, and Thomas (John 20: 19-29). After Thomas finally saw Christ for himself, John tells us that there were so many sightings of Christ that he selected just a few to share with us.

The next one John chose to share was one he experienced that combined fishing and eating. If there was anything Jesus did in his years of teaching and healing, it was sitting and eating with fishermen. There is a certain familiarity in John's account of the fishing disciples having breakfast with Jesus.

When Passover was over, the remaining eleven disciples stayed together while they returned from Jerusalem to their everyday mundane work. One would imagine they even returned to synagogue in Nazareth. Perhaps they sang Psalm 133 together; "How good! How delightful it is for God's people, to come and live together like family in love."<sup>iv</sup> We know they gathered for meals together and we know they fished together. We know because it was when they out fishing that the Risen Christ arrived to serve them breakfast.

Peter, John, and five others were out night fishing. They caught nothing, nothing at all. At day break, a man stood on the beach—Christ of course, but they didn't recognize him. They even talked to him. "Did you catch anything?" with "Not a single fish." Hearing his voice, they didn't recognized Christ.

The unidentified Christ said to the seven fishing apostles, "Cast your net on the right side of the boat, you will find some fish there." According to John's eye-witness report, they did what the unidentified Christ said to do. John doesn't say a word about how willing or unwilling they were to take this stranger's advice, so one wonders was it an immediate leap of faith or did they have a little debate about what to do first? If it were you and I, what would we do? But once the disciples decided to take the unidentified Christ's advice and start again, John wrote they couldn't pull the catch into the boat because there were so many fish!

Only then does John<sup>v</sup> say to Peter, "It's the Lord!"

Here is the great reversal in Christ's resurrection. At the start of his ministry, Jesus called them from fishing to follow him. In Mark's gospel, the oldest, Jesus even said, "I will make you fishers of men if you follow me."<sup>vi</sup> (Mark 1:16-20)

When the risen Christ called Peter was so excited that he grabbed his clothes and jumped in the water to get to Jesus as fast as he could. One wonders if he fell down at Jesus feet the way he did in Luke's report of their call (Luke 5:1-11) or if he dared to throw his arms around the risen Christ in a giant bear hug? (I always see Peter as something of a bear hugging giant of a man.) Rather than swim in, the other six disciples brought the boat in, dragging their catch with them. With all ashore, Jesus hosted breakfast, fish and bread cooked on a lakeside fire. (John 21:8-14) Now isn't that a dinner party you would want an invitation for? I sure would!

Their call to start again came soon after breakfast.

Breakfast with Jesus is no free lunch. Breakfast with Jesus comes with a call to serve. Breakfast with Jesus requires that we get out of the boat and start again as a fisher of men, women, and children. It is an opportunity to start again. In Matthew's version of the disciples first call the disciples response to Jesus call to "Follow me" is "Immediately they left their nets and followed him." (Matthew 4:20, New Revised Standard Version) All of us who ever imagined singing Peter's lines in *Superstar* ". . . so could we start again please." can hear Christ sing to Peter, "so would you feed my sheep?"

Thank heaven that Peter said yes to starting again.

Would you?

## John 21:3-14, The Common English Bible (CEB)<sup>vii</sup>

3 Simon Peter told them, “I’m going fishing.”

They said, “We’ll go with you.” They set out in a boat, but throughout the night they caught nothing. 4 Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples didn’t realize it was Jesus.

5 Jesus called to them, “Children, have you caught anything to eat?”

They answered him, “No.”

6 He said, “Cast your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.”

So they did, and there were so many fish that they couldn’t haul in the net. 7 Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It’s the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard it was the Lord, he wrapped his coat around himself (for he was naked) and jumped into the water. 8 The other disciples followed in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they weren’t far from shore, only about one hundred yards.

9 When they landed, they saw a fire there, with fish on it, and some bread. 10 Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you’ve just caught.” 11 Simon Peter got up and pulled the net to shore. It was full of large fish, one hundred fifty-three of them. Yet the net hadn’t torn, even with so many fish. 12 Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples could bring themselves to ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came, took the bread, and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish. 14 This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

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<sup>i</sup> Andrew Lloyd Weber and Tim Rice, broadcast live on Sunday 1 April 2018, NBC, KARE 11 in the Twin Cities market

<sup>ii</sup> <https://genius.com/Andrew-lloyd-webber-could-we-start-again-please-lyrics>, Accessed on 4/3/2018.

<sup>iii</sup> Judas' Story - 'The Making of Jesus Christ Superstar', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dV5AfhY2cbs>

<sup>iv</sup> From personal memory of singing psalms in folk worship during the mid-1970's. Could not locate a citable source on the Internet.

<sup>v</sup> The actual text says “the disciple whom Jesus loved” but this disciple in John’s gospel is commonly understood to be John himself.

<sup>vi</sup> Quoted from childhood memory of the song, “I will make you fishers of men.”

<sup>vii</sup> Copied and pasted from [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com). Copyright on text is 2011.