

Resurrection Relevance – Week 5 – “Moving Forward with Jesus”

Introduction

The final chapter of John’s gospel records two stories, one looks backward and the other looks forward. Peter has a starring role in both stories, the second more than the first. He is the one who suggests going fishing after he and some of the other disciples left Jerusalem and went to Galilee. The events described in the chapter took place between Jesus’ resurrection and his ascension. It was a relatively short journey of four or five days from Jerusalem to Capernaum. We know that the disciples returned to Jerusalem for the celebration of Pentecost along with pilgrims from all over the region. It makes sense that they would return home between the festivals of Passover and Pentecost given the length of time between them.

One almost comical element of the story is Peter’s declaration that “I’m going out to fish” as if the past three and a half years with Jesus were just a dream. He clearly did not know what to do with himself. Given the second story in the chapter, he may have believed himself unworthy to continue Jesus’ ministry. Note that Jesus did not immediately address Peter’s failure, choosing instead to invite them to him and the disciples with him to share a meal with him. This likely meant as much to Thomas as it did to Peter, given Thomas’ initial skepticism about Jesus resurrection from the dead.

The disciples who were with Peter were not all from Capernaum, which suggests that they still felt the need to stay together. Most of them were fisherman by trade and likely returned to what was familiar as they wrestled with what they had seen and heard recently. They knew that Jesus was alive but did not know what to do in response to it. They did not know in the moment how to move forward, but they were open to another encounter with Jesus. Many of us can identify with them in this struggle. The good news is that Jesus is always ready to meet us in our doubt and uncertainty and to show us how to lean on him as we seek to do his will.

Opening Discussion:

1. Share one thing that you found helpful from Sunday’s message.

Study Time:

Jesus invited his disciples to share a meal with them, his way of showing them that he had not rejected them because of their doubts. Sharing a meal with someone was an expression of friendship and one of the ways that families bonded with one another. It was an honored act of hospitality. Jesus broke bread with his disciples, which would have reminded them of the last meal that he shared with them before his arrest and crucifixion.

1. Jesus opened the door to a meaningful conversation with his disciples when he offered them hospitality despite their doubts. The meal that he shared with them led to a deeper conversation with Peter later in the story. What are some ways that we can build connections with nonbelievers that can open the door to a meaningful conversation about Jesus?
2. The picture of the disciples fishing all night and catching nothing recalls a story recorded in Mark 5:1-11 about the first time Peter met Jesus. Peter had fished all night and caught nothing but lowered the nets again after Jesus told him to and caught an amazing number of fish. In our story, they recognized Jesus when it happened again. They allowed uncertainty and disappointment to cloud their minds and keep them from recognizing Jesus. What are some ways that we can work through our disappointment and uncertainty about faith, and life in general, that can deepen our faith?
3. Peter was not the first disciple in this story to recognize Jesus, but he was the first one to act on that recognition. When “the disciple whom Jesus loved” said to him, “It is the Lord,” Peter jumped in the water and swam to shore. He was drawn to Jesus, like the first time they met (Mark 5:8), despite his awareness of his sinfulness. What are some ways that we allow our awareness of this in our own lives to keep us from approaching Jesus?

Much has been made of Peter's impromptu fishing expedition. Why did he and the disciples who were with him decide to go fishing instead of fulfilling Christ's call to go out into the world to tell the good news? Some see this as a clear sign of Peter's discouragement and disappointment. Things did not turn out the way that he expected. Jesus was arrested, put on trial, and executed by the Romans instead of raising an army and throwing them out of Judea. Jesus did not stay in his borrowed tomb, however, and had appeared them in ways that proved that he was alive. Yet, their disappointment remained.

1. Peter and some of the other disciples returned to Galilee after Jesus appeared to them in Jerusalem. They had not yet understood the mission that Jesus had given them. The future was uncertain, which may have been one reason why Peter returned to what was familiar: fishing. What are some ways that we can allow past experiences to keep us from moving forward into the future?
2. Have you ever prayed for something and not received the answer for which you hoped? It is natural to be discouraged when this happens and to wonder if God can still use you to accomplish His purposes. The good news is that God uses us despite our doubts so long as we keep looking to Him and doing our best to trust Him. What are some ways that this good news can help us move forward in our faith journey despite any perceived setbacks?
3. Sometimes being faithful means hanging on for dear life even, and especially, when God seems far away. One thing that we learn from this story is that God still works with us when we struggle with disappointment and doubt. Faith is a matter of both the head and the heart. What we know about Jesus can help us get through those times when we do not feel faithful. Moments of enthusiasm can help us when we do not fully understand how God is working in our lives and the lives of those around us. What are some ways that we can keep our faith focused and strong when we struggle to sense God's presence?