

It Is the Lord!... Feed My Sheep

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Date: 19 April 2026

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Today's scripture reading is from the Gospel according to John, chapters 21, verses 1-25 as printed in the liturgy.

A reading from the Gospel according to John. Afterward, Jesus appeared to his disciples by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way.

Simon Peter, Thomas, also known as Didymus, Nathaniel 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. 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?

[1 : 14] 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.

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 was fish on it and some bread. So 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?

[2 : 14] 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.

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. 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. 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 and dressed yourself and went where you wanted, but when you are old, will stretch out your hands and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.

[3 : 21] Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, follow me. 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. Because of this, the rumors 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? This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote about them. We know that his testimony is true. Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world will not have room for the books that would be written.

[4 : 20] This is the gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ. Thank you, Tonya, and happy birthday, Christ Church. We are honored today to have Bart and Katie Garrett here, who is my sister and brother-in-law, and more importantly, the founders of Christ Church, who poured 14 years of their lives out here, their time, talent, and treasure, lots of blood, sweat, and tears as well.

And it would be hard to estimate just how much love that they've invested into this church. And so we're pleased to have them, and Bart's going to be leading us in communion and praying for us in a moment.

We're also celebrating the 20th birthday of Christ Church by sending Andrew off on a four-month sabbatical. So happy birthday, Christ Church, via Andrew.

Thank you. We, you know, I've been thinking this week a lot about this verse in 1 Corinthians 3. It's a new community of Christians in Corinth, all of them converts from their former Greco-Roman way of life.

And Paul, the Apostle Paul, compares them to a new tree, this living organism. And he says, you know, there's been all these people that have planted the church, that have watered the church.

[5 : 47] But then Paul says, so neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who makes things grow. And I just, my prayer all week has been, only God.

You know, and that's really our heart today in this worship service, is we just want to thank only God and praise only God because only he's the one that makes things grow. And if we keep humbling ourselves before him and asking him, he'll keep making things grow.

So only God. And we, you know, as we come to this, the end of this sermon series in the Gospel of John, it's just a beautiful picture, I think, of what a church is supposed to be.

You know, Jesus is risen from the dead. He's alive forevermore. And he's gone through death. He's come out the other side. He's gone on into this new creation.

And now he's gathering together with his disciples. And he's showing them the kind of life he wants them to live. And so what I want to talk about today is fishing with Jesus, eating near Jesus, and shepherding under Jesus.

[6 : 59] And you can just kind of track. These are the three movements of this text. Fishing with Jesus, eating near Jesus, and shepherding under Jesus. And let's start with fishing with Jesus.

What is this story for? Why was this story written down for us? Well, it says explicitly in verse 1 that afterward, Jesus appeared again to his disciples by the Sea of Galilee.

And this is the way it happened. And then down in verse 14, it says, this was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

So on Easter Sunday, God literally, physically, historically raised Jesus from the dead. And after that great event, Jesus is now coming to individuals and pairs and groups of disciples in order that he might convince them that he really has been glorified, that this body of his is an incorruptible and victorious body.

And it's the prototype of the kind of bodies that his disciples are going to have when they're raised at the end of time. It's like Jesus is coming to them and he's wanting to convince them that even though sin and death had been ruling over this world for a very, very long time, through his cross and through his resurrection, sin and death had been overthrown.

[8 : 29] And now there's a new king. There's a new Lord. And he's reigning in grace. He's reigning in righteousness. He's wanting to share his eternal life with his disciples.

And so Jesus just keeps appearing to them and trying to convince them of these things. And notice how he chooses to appear and reveal himself here in this story.

It says in verse 3, Simon Peter told the rest of the disciples, I'm going out to fish. And they said, well, okay, we'll go along with you. And so they went out and they got into the boat.

But that night they caught nothing. And early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. And so he called out to them, friends, haven't you any fish?

And what's interesting is that in the Greek text, he doesn't use the word friends. He uses the word kids. And the question sounds like this. Children, you have no fish, have you?

[9 : 27] It's this really playful and provocative thing that the resurrected Jesus is doing with his disciples. Why is he asking the question this way? Why is he drawing attention to their fishing failure and to their empty nets and their empty boat?

Verse 3 emphasizes they fished all night and they caught what? Nothing. It's the same word that Jesus used in the upper room when he said, apart from me, you can do nothing.

In John 15, I'll just read a little bit more of that text. He's in the upper room with his disciples the night before he dies. And he says, no branch can bear fruit by itself.

It must remain in the vine. And neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I'm the vine. You are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit.

Apart from me, you can do nothing. See, the disciples have gone out fishing, but they're doing it by themselves. They're doing it apart from Jesus.

[10 : 30] They're doing it without the resurrected Jesus. And what is the result? The result is that they've caught nothing. And of course, you know, fishing in the Gospels, it's never just about fishing, is it?

Because when Jesus first called these guys, what did he say? He said, come, come follow me and I will make you into fishers of men. Come follow me and I will send you out to fish for people.

And that's the mission of the disciple community. That Jesus' disciples are to fish for people. But if we try to go fishing by ourselves, we try to fish apart from Jesus.

And without Jesus, what are we going to catch? Nothing. If we try to bear fruit in our worship, in our fellowship, in our mission, apart from the living and life-giving vine, it's going to be like that moment where, you know, you see a tree that's bearing fruit and you pick a piece off and it looks so good.

And then you bite into it and immediately you regret that decision and you just want to spit it out.

That's what Jesus is saying. That's the kind of fruit you'll bear without me. And in the same way, Jesus is saying, if you try to go fishing for people, you're not really going to catch many people without me.

[11 : 55] Verse 6, he says, throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some. And, you know, when Jesus says this, every guy in the boat would immediately remember what happened the very first time.

And I don't know if you remember that story, but it's in Luke chapter 5 where Jesus doesn't really know Peter very well. But he steps into Peter's boat and he starts giving Peter fishing advice.

And Peter says, well, master, we've worked hard all night and we've caught, again, nothing. And Jesus tells Peter, well, put out into the deep water, which, by the way, no one fishes in the deep water.

But he says, put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch. Now, Peter has spent his whole life fishing these waters. His father and his grandfather before him have been fishermen. Peter knows how to make a good living at fishing. Peter has a thriving and a profitable fishing business. And he knows that Jesus is just a stonemason.

[13 : 01] Jesus is just a builder. Jesus knows nothing about fishing and is giving him terrible fishing advice. And he knows that Jesus is testing him in a way, asking him whether or not he's willing to go against his own instincts and his own experiences.

But Peter also knows that he's been relying on himself and relying on all the things that he knows. And yet the result is he's caught what?

He's caught nothing. And, you know, the turning point in that story in Luke 5 is that when Peter trusts Jesus, he says to Jesus, Jesus, because you say so, he says, Jesus, at your word, I'm going to let down the nets.

And the result is that they get this enormous, miraculous catch of fish. And Peter, in that moment, he's astonished and he falls at Jesus' feet. He says, go away from me, Lord, for I'm a sinful man.

And Jesus says to Peter, don't be afraid, Peter, because from now on you're going to fish for people. You're going to be catching people. So you see in John 21, when the resurrected and living Lord Jesus comes to Peter and comes to his disciples, he wants to let them know that the mission of fishing for people and catching people has not changed.

[14 : 30] But he also wants to let them know that the fishing mission has to be on my terms. And it has to be according to my word. Put out into deep water.

Throw out your net on the right side of the boat. How can Jesus say that? How does Jesus know where all the fish are? Has Jesus gone to Bass Pro Shop and gotten some expensive, high-end, the ultrasonic fish finder?

No, see, the universe was created through Jesus, ex nihilo. And God has raised Jesus up from the dead. And so fish aren't hard for Jesus.

If Jesus says the fish are going to be out in the deep water, if Jesus says the fish are going to be on that side of the boat and not on this side of the boat, well, that's where the fish are going to be.

Because that's how powerful Jesus is.

And that's how powerful his word is. Isaiah 55 says, My word that goes forth from my mouth will not return to me empty, but it will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent my word.

[15:42] And you see, when Jesus' disciple community lives in obedience to his powerful word, when it trusts his trustworthy commands, when it carries out its mission under the authority of Jesus and in line with the direction of Jesus, well, we're not just going to catch many fish.

We're going to catch many, many people. Friends, the question that this text asks us to examine ourselves with is, in what ways are we trying to bear fruit by ourselves?

In what ways are we trying to catch people apart from him? How are we operating in our own energy, our own knowledge, our own resources, our own strength?

But in the end, coming up feeling empty and exhausted, really bearing very little fruit worth having, not really catching many people, not really getting anywhere.

See, verse 6 says, Throw your net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some. And when they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. When they listened to his word, when they obeyed his word, that is the moment that they experienced Jesus' resurrection power.

[17:12] And that's how the fishing ministry of the church would continue over the next three centuries. Jesus, as his disciple community, was faithful to Jesus and obedient to Jesus.

You know, in three centuries, half of the Roman Empire came into the net and came into the boat of the church. And that was not hard for God.

And it's not hard for God today. We think that, oh man, it's like nearly impossible for God to bring people into a relationship with himself here in Berkeley and in the East Bay in 2026.

But it's never been hard for God. In Christ's church, my prayer in our third decade is that we'll not go out and work hard individually, collectively, on our own, by ourselves, apart from the risen Lord.

But rather, that we'll remain in him, that we'll listen to him, we'll do what he says, and then we'll just sit back and watch him do astonishing and supernatural things.

[18:21] Amen? So, the mission of the church is to fish with Jesus. But also, it's to, it's to eat near Jesus. It's about eating near Jesus.

What fascinates me is, you know, Peter swims to shore and he makes all the other disciples do the hard work of getting the boat to shore. But when they all finally get to the shore, how does Jesus say, hey guys, I'm raised, I've been raised from the dead, let's celebrate.

How does he do that? Well, he just cooks breakfast for his friends. It says in verse 9 that they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it and some bread was there and Jesus said to them in verse 12, come and have breakfast.

And none of the disciples dared ask him, who are you? Because they knew it was the Lord. And Jesus came and he took the bread and he gave it to them and he did the same with the fish and this was now the third time that he appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

See, there's this simple invitation from Jesus that indicates something about the new creation that's been launched in the resurrection. And it's just this invitation to deep connection.

[19:36] This invitation to deep communion communion with Jesus. And I imagine when the risen and living Lord is giving them the bread and giving them the fish that their minds and their hearts are going back to those other moments, right, where Jesus took five loaves of fish and two, five loaves of bread, two little fish and he sent his disciples out and said, trust me, trust me guys, this is going to go a long way.

And they went out and they fed thousands with barely anything. And I'm sure their hearts and their minds are going back the other night, the other week, where Jesus took the Passover meal and he said, he said, this is now the Lord's Supper and he gave them the bread and he said, this is my

body, do this in remembrance of me.

And so when Jesus says to them, come have breakfast with me, what's he saying? What does this mean for us? It means that we're not just supposed to believe in Jesus in some abstract and detached way.

But rather, it's an invitation to intimate communion with Jesus to experience his life and his power. You see, in the ancient world to invite someone to come and eat with you, it meant a lot more than it means today.

Today it means, hey, come eat with us and it's kind of a friendly gesture. I might possibly want to be your friend. But in the ancient world, it was a pledge. It was saying, I want you to be like family with me.

[21 : 07] I want you to be in closest relationship to me. And Jesus is saying here, I don't just want you guys to believe in me. I don't even just want you to obey me. I want you to know me.

I want to share my life and all that I have with you. In the gospels, one of the chief complaints against Jesus is people keep coming to his disciples and say, Jesus, why, or they say to his disciples, why does your master Jesus keep eating with sinners?

And they realize that Jesus is practicing radical hospitality. Jesus is including all the wrong people in the kingdom of God.

And you think about these tax collectors Jesus was gathering around himself who were, just imagine the most despised people in our society. Sellouts, traitors.

And Jesus is over at the home of one of these tax collectors named Matthew and he says at that meal, he says, it's not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. I've not come to call the righteous but sinners.

[22 : 20] And he says to a guy named Zacchaeus, another tax collector, he says, today salvation has come to this house for the son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost. And so Jesus has this pattern of eating meals with all the wrong people and he gets to this beach after his resurrection and he says to these failed disciples who've denied him, who've abandoned him and he says, come have breakfast with me.

Come sit at my table. Come share in my meal because I've come to seek and to save the lost. and I want to know you and I want you to know me.

I want you to know my salvation. I want you to know the power of my grace. You see, here on this beach, the risen Lord is saying to them, I want to share my resurrection life and power with you.

And I'll just pause here for just an application is just this, that do you know that the risen Lord wants to be in intimate communion with you.

Not just here in this meal, but every morning, every evening, Jesus is there and he's waiting for you and he's saying, come and eat with me.

[23 : 41] Come and let me feed you. Let me nourish you. Let me give you substance and energy and life. I've never met a healthy Christian who did not have the daily practice of saying yes to this invitation to intimate communion with the risen Lord.

And so my encouragement to you is just to turn off your device, put your book aside, don't watch the show, and just be near Jesus.

Just be near him in his word. Just be near him in prayer. Just be close with him in Christian fellowship. Just come and stay by his side in the Lord's Supper and just enjoy the presence of our living Lord.

That's what the Christian life is all about. That's what the ministry of the church is all about. And the second thing is Christian ministry is simply just finding people and saying, hey, do you want to come and have breakfast with me?

Do you want to come and have lunch with us? And it's just simply inviting people, whether they're inside the church or outside the church, to come and enjoy intimate communion with us as we're in the presence of the risen Lord.

[25 : 04] That's what Christian ministry is. and I hope that this will be one of the marks of our ministry as we move into our third decade together because it's how the resurrected Lord is building his disciple community on that beach over a simple meal of bread and fish.

The third thing I want to talk about is not just fishing with Jesus and eating near Jesus, but I want to talk finally about shepherding under Jesus. shepherding under Jesus.

This is the final lesson in Jesus' resurrection appearance and it has to do with Peter and it has to do with all who, like Peter, have ever spectacularly and miserably failed.

Here we learn something about how Jesus can heal our memories and how he can come into places of buried hurt and fear places of hidden failure and sin in our lives and he can just come in and somehow he just deals with it.

And Jesus just, he draws Peter around this meal and this fire and he begins to just gently expose this deep and unhealed wound in Peter and start to deal with this failure.

[26 : 24] And if you'll remember back to John 13, it was over a meal, it was over the Last Supper where Peter insisted emphatically he says, you know, Jesus, I'm going to remain loyal to you even if all these others are not, I'm going to be loyal to you.

And he says to Jesus, I'm going to follow you to prison and to death. I'm prepared to lay down my life on your behalf. And then later in John 18, it was over a charcoal fire in that courtyard where Peter tried to do that but he failed spectacularly.

Not just once, not just twice but three times, he denied three times. It's not just that I don't follow him, it's that I don't even know Jesus. I've never even met the guy.

And Peter goes out that night in shame and in tears and he's going to be dogged by this memory for the rest of his life that I was a coward and I was a failure and I'm full of guilt and I'm full of shame.

How in the world did I screw up so miserably? How did I fail Jesus in his hour of greatest need? And so, the resurrected Jesus comes and he recreates the scene of Jesus' pride at that meal or Peter's pride at that meal and Peter's failure at that fire and now here on the beach there's a new fire and there's a fresh meal and Jesus begins to just gently expose this wound in his beloved disciple and he begins to treat it with love and with prayer and he begins to bathe it in the power of God and it's one of the most spectacular exchanges in the whole Bible where Jesus asked Peter three times he says, do you love me?

[28 : 10] Do you love me? Do you love me? And Jesus is giving Peter an opportunity to admit how weak he is. He's giving him an opportunity to repent of all of his failures and how does Peter respond to this gentle probing of Jesus in his heart?

Well, Peter just says, Lord, you know. Lord, you know that I love you. Lord, you know all things. You see, now Peter rests his confidence not on the strength of his love for Jesus.

No, he's resting on the sureness of Jesus' knowledge of him and of all things. Jesus knows and Jesus has the power to deal with Peter's threefold failure and to take away his sins and not only to take away his sins but to take away the memories of his old failings and sores and his wounds and his pains.

That's how powerful the resurrected Jesus is. You know, they're probably at this point walking along the beach and Peter's answering Jesus' questions and Jesus' response is not just a pat on the back and saying, hey, that's all right, Peter.

Come and be my sheep. No, he doesn't say come and be my sheep. He says, Peter, you're the biggest failure I've ever met and then he gives him a command and a fresh challenge and a new commission and Peter's threefold denial is just wiped out and forgiven with this threefold commission.

[29 : 51] He says, Peter, it's time for you to learn how to be a forgiven and fearless shepherd. It's time for you to learn how to feed my lambs. It's time for you to look after my sheep.

You see, when Jesus forgives us, he also gives us a job to do. He also equips us and he empowers us to share in his ministry. that moment when we profess our love for Jesus for the first time, he says, well, then let's get to work.

And this is the one who in John 10 said, well, I'm the good shepherd. And now he's saying to Peter, I want you to share in my work and my ministry of shepherding with me.

I'm the one who has the task of leading and feeding and caring for my sheep. I'm the one who's going to guide them to and from good pastures and green pastures. I'm the one who's supposed to keep them safe from all the wolves and the thieves.

But Peter, from now on, now that I've plunged your failure into my grace, I want you to share in my work of shepherding. And of course, we know that Peter had a special role in the early church and the founding and leadership of the church.

[31 : 08] But really, every Christian, everyone who's been baptized, everyone who comes and shares in the meal with Jesus, every Christian has a share in the ministry of the good shepherd.

And here's the secret of that ministry. Here's the secret of your ministry and my ministry. Whether you're a layperson or you're ordained, whether you're part-time or full-time or volunteer, if you're going to do anything as a follower of Jesus, if you're going to do anything as a servant of Jesus, this is what it all comes down to.

Somewhere deep down inside, the question is, is there a love for Jesus? Can you say with Peter, yes, Lord, you know that somewhere deep down inside, I love you.

I love you. I love you. That's the key and ultimate question. No matter how much you've struggled and failed in your discipleship, Jesus wants to know, do you love me?

And though goodness knows we've all let him down plenty of times, he wants to find that love in us. He wants to give us a chance to express our love and he wants to come like Peter and heal the hurts and heal the failures of our past and say, well, let's get on with it.

[32 : 41] You've got a new job to do. And it's out of that grace and joy and relief that you've been forgiven. And as a sign that you are forgiven, that Jesus wants you to go out and he wants you to love him by loving his flock.

All of us are called to find a sheep, even just one sheep, and to care for that sheep with selfless love, like Jesus. All of us are called to find at least one sheep and just feed that sheep with biblical truth.

All of us are called to just find one sheep and just shepherd that sheep with humble service and to go out and show our love for Jesus by loving his church.

So Christ Church, as we mark our 20th birthday today, as we enter into the third decade of our ministry together, Jesus is offering us the same thing he offered those disciples on that beach.

He's just offering us a restored and a transformed and a newly commissioned life. To come and fish with Jesus.

[33 : 56] To come and eat near Jesus. To come and shepherd under Jesus. it's an amazing life. That the resurrected Lord is calling us to live with him.

And that's what I pray we'll be about. That's what I pray we'll get together and do is the fishing and the eating and the shepherding of Jesus.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.