

The Good Shepherd in Action

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[0 : 00] So the reading this morning is from, it's mostly John chapter 21, but we'll start at verse 30 of John 20.

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

After this, Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. Simon Peter, Thomas, called the twin, Nathaniel of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples were together.

Simon Peter said to them, I'm going fishing. They said to him, we'll go with you. They went out and got into a boat, but that night they caught nothing. Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore, yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.

Jesus said to them, children, do you have any fish? They answered him, no. He said to them, cast the net on the right side of the boat and you'll find some. So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because of the quantity of fish.

[1 : 23] That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, it is the Lord. When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea.

The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, about a hundred yards off. When they got out on land and saw a charcoal fire, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it and bread.

Jesus said to them, bring some of the fish that you have caught. So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them, and although there were so many, the net was not torn.

Jesus said to them, come and have breakfast. Now none of the disciples dared ask him, who are you? They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so would the fish.

This was now the third time he was revealed to the disciples, after he was raised from the dead. When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?

[2 : 32] He said to him, yes, Lord, you know that I love you. He said to him, feed my lands. He said to him a second time, Simon, son of John, do you love me?

He said to him, yes, Lord, you know that I love you. He said to him, tend my sheep. He said to him the third time, Simon, son of John, do you love me?

Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, do you love me? And he said to him, Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you. Jesus said to him, feed my sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted.

But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go. This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God. And after saying this, he said to him, follow me.

Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also leaned back against him during the supper and had said, Lord, who is it who is going to betray you?

[3 : 39] When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, Lord, what about this man? Jesus said to him, if it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me.

So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not going to die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not going to die. But if it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?

This is that disciple who is bearing witness about these things and who has written these things. And we know that his testimony is true. Now, there were also many other things that Jesus did.

Were every one of them to be written? I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. This is the word of God. Memories are interesting things.

They can be triggered by a whole variety of things. A sight, a smell, a sound, a taste. I only have to hear the song Penny Lane by the Beatles.

[4 : 40] And I'm transported back over 50 years. There was a young boy walking along the cliff road in Caithness with his mum and dad. And past a place called the Trinkie, which is actually a large rock pool that was turned into an open-air swimming pool.

Water from the North Sea, so it was a bit cold. But there must have been a fake or something going on at that time. And there was lots of things going on, games, people down at the Trinkie. And there was ice cream vans.

And there was a van there with a loudspeaker on top of it, blaring out Penny Lane. And for some reason, I just have to hear that, and that's me. Last Thursday, Sarah and I were going into town.

This wasn't even something I'd seen, but it was a vague image that just triggered something. We were passing, coming up to Currie Hill, and you get a clear view of the castle right the way to Arthur's seat, if you sit on the right side of the train.

Well, actually, the right side is the left side of your heading into Edinburgh. And that just triggered in me a memory of Primary 7 and our trip to Edinburgh, which the school arranged, and we went round all the things, the castle, Arthur's seat, Holyrood Palace.

[5 : 50] And I had to do a project afterwards, which was to build a model of the Arthur's seat and the road out from it. And I was taken straight back to that. My model was completely rubbish because I don't have an artistic bone in my body, but that was my memory.

This passage is absolutely replete with triggers. They're necessary because this was Jesus helping the disciples, recommissioning them, making them ready for what was going ahead.

They're images which take back three years, compressed into a matter of hours. Here is the Good Shepherd dealing with his people in exactly the way they need.

He's the active one. It's not the disciples. Jesus is the one organizing. He's arranging. He's helping. He's working. The disciples, they've been told to go back to Galilee.

Matthew 27, they're told, go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee.

[7 : 00] So they're in Galilee. We don't know what they've been doing most of the time. Perhaps they're going a bit stir-crazy. But anyway, Peter at some point, it has to be Peter, of course, good old impetuous Peter.

He's going to be fishing. And then we're going to do the same. Now, Jesus, this represents all the disciples.

They go out, and there's a familiar ring to this. We should see that they go through the whole night, and they've got no fish.

At the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, when he calls the disciples, it records in Luke 5, 4 to 10. When he finished speaking, he said to Simon, put out into the deep and let your nets down for a catch.

And Simon answered, Master, we toiled all night and took nothing. But at your word, I will let your nets. When they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish. And Peter falls at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man.

[8 : 11] For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken. Jesus says, Do not be afraid. From now on you'll be catching men. So this is the image.

This is the memory that the very beginning, the beginning of the disciples' ministry, what they were to go on with. But the key thing is, this is a visual parable. As so many of Jesus' miracles are, they teach a lesson.

And that lesson is not simply that Jesus performed miracles. They are significant in the sense that they have meaning, this finding how Jesus works.

They had to obey. And in this case, they don't argue with Jesus. So obviously there was something there in the disciples' minds that they had learnt over the three years.

So they do what Jesus says, and they put the nets on the right side, and they catch fish. Now, they had to cast the nets. But they'd been working with all their expertise as fishermen all night, and they'd caught nothing.

[9 : 19] Working on their own knowledge, working on their own steam, didn't yield any results. But they still had to work when Jesus told them what to do.

They just had to do what he told them to do. They had to obey. And here they exhibit an unquestioning obedience. There are some differences. The unquestioning obedience is one.

The nets don't break in this case. So the fishers of men represents how we are to go out and do evangelism. How the disciples were to go out. They weren't to do it in their own strength.

They weren't to do it using their own self-sufficient knowledge or expertise. They were to do it, and they were to work, and they were to work hard. But they were to do it in exactly the way that Jesus had told them to do it.

Paul may plant, and Apollos may water. But it is God, it is Jesus, that gives the increase. We can then move on.

[10 : 23] So that's one image that Jesus has provided. A memory, the beginning, and the method that they are to do. Then there's the meal. So they come along, and Jesus has himself prepared a meal for them.

Again, there are images here that proclaim both fellowship and Jesus' ability to feed. First of all, there was the feeding of the 5,000, where he took bread and fish, which he could make sufficient for whatever number of people required to be fed.

There is no limit to what Jesus can do. But the taking and eating is also reminiscent of the fellowship that we have in Jesus.

The Last Supper, for he himself gave the bread that was representative of his body, and the drink that they took. So I wonder if these echoes, remembrances were in the disciples' mind when Jesus was giving these things.

To remember that the fellowship meal is a meal of love for one another, and that Jesus is the one who can supply all their needs. He supplies all of our needs. We are not alone.

[11 : 39] We can't feed ourselves spiritually. But there is no limit. There is no restriction on what Jesus gives in terms of providing food for our souls, and for our benefit, for our growth, for his glory.

Now, that's the general recommissioning. Peter's involved, and Peter is part of that general recommissioning. He is one of the disciples.

Some of the disciples are named. Some aren't. We don't know if they were one of the twelve, or whether they were just two other general disciples who happened to be there in Galilee among the 70 or the 120, or just other followers.

Not named, but they are commissioned in exactly the same way as the rest. But there's one person there who Jesus focuses on and gives a specific reinstatement to the position which he was in or wanted to be in before.

The first echo of this is when they get off the boat. There's a charcoal fire. And the one other place, John is very specific in what he says.

[12 : 50] Would that have sparked a memory in Peter's mind? Where else was there a charcoal fire in a semi-dark environment? The servant, John 18, 17 and 18.

The servant girl at the door said to Peter, You also are not one of these man's disciples, are you? He said, I'm not. Now, the servants had a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves.

And Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself. So, Peter is there, the charcoal fire. Here's another charcoal fire. Did Peter feel uneasy?

Did that memory get sparked? Peter's pain must have been deep. When he was standing there, Luke records that after an interval of an hour, still another insisted, saying, Certainly this man also was with them, for he too is a Galilean.

But Peter said, Man, I do not know what you're talking about. And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he said to him, Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.

[14 : 06] And he went out and wept bitterly. Peter was very impetuous, but he could feel deeply. And this must have really pierced him.

I remember Alexander referring to this, Jesus turning and looking at Peter. He said, I don't think that Luke said, I told you so. He said, I think that Luke said, I love you still.

Peter would have related to Psalm 130, verse 1. Lord, from the depths to thee I cried, My voice, Lord, do thou hear? Unto my supplications wise, given a tenth of the year.

He was in the depths. And he had to face more. He had to face up to his own sin of sufficiency, which led to him to that. And Jesus takes him aside and says, Do you love me more than these?

Peter had said previously, Though they should all fall away because of you, I will never fall away. Jesus said, Truly I say to you, this night before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.

[15 : 17] And Peter said, Even if I stay with you, I will not deny you. And all the disciples said the same. So Peter wasn't alone in saying that he would stand with Jesus.

But Peter went further. He claimed he would love Jesus more than anyone else. What was it that led to Peter's fall to his denial?

The other disciples didn't deny me because the other disciples actually fled. They denied Jesus in one way because they'd said, We'll die with you. But they fled as soon as the soldiers appeared. How did Peter end up in that position?

Because he went further. He actually did go further than the other disciples. He actually did follow Jesus. He did try to be with him. But how did he do it?

He did it on his own self-sufficiency. He had said, Not, Lord, if you help me, I will be with you. I will follow you. He said, I won't let you down.

[16 : 19] I'm Peter. I'm the strong one. I can do this. And sure, with self-sufficiency, he did get so far. He got to the position where he found himself surrounded by enemies.

And realized that he was in a position where his weakness took over. He'd bitten off more than he can chew. And that pride needed to be addressed.

So Jesus says, Do you really love me more than these do? You need to face up to this. Again, as we read in Psalm 127, Except the Lord do build the house, the builders lose their pain.

Except the Lord the city keep the watchman watch in vain. Without Jesus, without his guidance, Without us doing it on his strength, in his ways, Relying and looking to him.

Maybe in his mercy, certain things will happen. We'll get so far. We'll do so much. But our own self-sufficiency is going to let us down and let him down. And like Shoras, we can just end up, and Peter, We can end up in more trouble than if we hadn't actually started.

[17 : 29] So we need to be looking to Jesus. And he is the one, he brings him forward, he makes him face up to this. But it's not, again, it's not about Peter being just made to face up to, To dig in, to say, I told you so.

To focus on what he has done wrong. It's to reinstate him. It's not the, Peter, do you love me? That Jesus wants to focus on.

It's feed my lambs. Feed my sheep. You are going to be my servant. Do what I say. Be the servant I want you to be.

Be the preacher. Be the teacher. Be the evangelist. Do it in my strength. I am commissioning you. This is wonderful. Peter is being told that despite everything, Jesus is recommissioning him, giving him a task.

It's mind-blowing. Peter needed to know why. This is why there was this whole sequence. But it's an unwinding. He denied him three times. So Jesus reinstates him three times.

[18 : 32] So it's all unraveled, put back the way it ought to be. The third echo is that Peter, unlike any other disciple, is actually told that his faith won't fail.

Before the crucifixion, Jesus had told Peter, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat.

But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you're turned again, strengthen your brothers. I have prayed for you. Jesus tells Peter that the Son of God, the one who upholds all things by the word of his power, the one that Hebrews says will be heard because of his faithfulness, has prayed for Peter.

Peter didn't realize it, and perhaps we don't realize it, but that's a pretty amazing thing. Jesus now lives to make intercession for us. The Son of God is praying for us.

And here he tells Peter how he's going to die, how he will die for Christ. That should be a comfort for him because Jesus has told him, in telling him how he's going to glorify God, how he is going to...

[19 : 56] because the stretching out your arms, the way this is described is a euphemistic term, apparently, in the first century, for you're going to be crucified. So Jesus told Peter exactly how he was going to die and that his faith would not fail.

So Peter had that comfort. Peter had that objective, absolute assurance from the Son of God that his faith would not fail. And that should be a comfort. In Psalm 37, A good man's footsteps by the Lord are ordered aright, by the Lord are ordered aright, and in the way wherein he walks he is greatly delighted.

Although he fall, and Peter did fall, yet shall he not be cast down utterly, because the Lord with his own hand upholds him mightily. Psalm 37, Peter had that, he was told this.

Of course, this is a great thing, except sanctification is not an instantaneous process. Peter remains Peter, and he does fall.

Paul had to withstand him to the face. And even here, no sooner has Jesus reinstated him than Peter changes the subject. He doesn't reflect. It's good old Peter.

[21 : 08] Peter is still the impetuous, engage your mouth before your brains and gear sort of person. And he says, what about this guy?

What about this guy who's following us? What's he going to do? You told me about me. What about him? It takes time. We look to Jesus, but we recognize that we are totally reliant on him. And that whilst we will be sanctified, whilst we will grow if we're walking close with him, we're not suddenly going to be made perfect.

Perfect. Only when we die and go to heaven will we be in that position. Now we're used today to thinking about fact-checking.

If the disciples had done some fact-checking and listened, Jesus says to Peter, you follow me, gets Peter right back to where he should be.

He's not distracted by Peter, but he does put something in. If I want him to remain till I come, that's none of your business. That might be the way. In communication, there's this idea of the intended meaning of the speaker and the received meaning of the hearer.

[22 : 16] Somehow Peter and the disciples didn't hear, what is that to you? But he is going to live forever or not die. But that's not what Jesus said.

And it's not what they should have heard. We have to be very careful how we read the Bible, how we listen to what is being said, even in a Christian context, to make sure that we've got our facts right, that we are understanding God's word correctly, and that we are trying our best, not twisting the scriptures, but seeking to understand it fully.

So Jesus has reinstated Peter. He has recommissioned the disciples. And the lesson throughout all this, through these memories, through these triggers, through these echoes, is follow me, look to me, rely on me, work for me.

He is the glorious Lord, and he has spoken. This is all about Jesus. He gives us what we want.

He cares for the people. You can see this. He is the servant king, lovingly, meticulously, effectively, working with the disciples in exactly their place of need, what they need for him to understand, to do, and to hear, and builds them up.

[23 : 37] The thing that slows things down is our pride. It needs to be purged out. And yet, these vessels are going from glory unto glory, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians.

That's a pretty amazing thing, and that should comfort us. That should inspire us to be more focused on and trying to be like Christ. They had a job.

to do. Jesus is the Lord over all, but he is commissioning them for a reason, to serve him as their Lord. They were to proclaim the gospel. We are standing here second Sunday of a new year.

We have opportunities all around us. We are a small body of God's people, but that doesn't mean we can't do anything. We proclaim the word. Maybe one person will be converted.

Maybe ten. Maybe a hundred. We don't know. But if we are doing what God wants in the way that God wants it, we have a comfort. If Jesus had just said, I'm going to make you fishers of men, it's up to you now.

[24 : 40] I've told you what to do. Go and do it. That would be stress in excelsis. But the second verse of Psalm 127 gives us the comfort.

Yes, it is vain for you to rise betimes or late from rest to keep to feed on Sauros bread. So gives he his beloved sleep.

If we're resting on him, we're doing things in his way, if he's working on it, he will accomplish what he needs. All we need to do is follow him. And we can sleep.

We can rest easy. We can be comforted. We don't have to worry about these things. But we do need to work. We still need to do what he tells us to do. But what if you're not a disciple?

This was all the recommissioning. It was all about the disciples and how Jesus was building them up and pointing them. His offer, his gracious command comes to everyone today.

[25 : 38] It still stands. As Isaiah said, turn to me and be saved all the ends of the earth for I am God and there is no other. There is no other. Jesus is the only way. But, why would you not want to have this kind of care and friendship and upholding and comfort and protection?

That's what Jesus gives. Follow him. So I cannot, something like this which is about God's commissioning which comes to the church, which came to the disciples, which comes to us.

there's nothing, I cannot end on a better note than the last words of Jesus before his ascension. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

God's commissioning and the Lord commanded you and behold I am with you always to the end of the age. Not go and convert them, go and make them disciples.

Conversion is just a starting point but Jesus is with us the whole church, not just parts of the church but all of us to the end of the age. That is our comfort, that is our incentive.

[26 : 57] we need to follow him. Amen. Let's pray. Lord, we ask that you would indeed build us up. We ask that you would give us humble hearts to do justly, love mercy and walk humbly before you, seeking to glorify your name, seeking to walk in your ways, seeking to build your kingdom for your glory.

forgive us for our slowness and our pride but change us and use us, we pray. And we ask this in Jesus' name and for his sake.

Amen.