

John 21:1-14 “The Savior You Can Count On”

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Date: 11 May 2025

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[0 : 0 0] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

! Now, we get an epilogue of sorts, but don't give up on it. It's a really important and poignant epilogue. As in all the other Gospels, John ends his by telling us about Jesus' sending of his disciples on his mission. John 21 is about one really significant day that Jesus appears to his disciples and three separate interactions the next three weeks, especially with Peter, that are powerfully encouraging to us as we live with and for the risen Jesus. Jesus himself and an angel have told them that he will meet them in Galilee, so they're back home and they're waiting to see Jesus when we read of this morning in John 21, starting at verse 1.

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, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together, and Simon Peter said to them, I am going fishing. They said to him, we will go with you. They went out and got into the 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.

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. And the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off. When they got out on land, 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 just caught. So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore full of large fish, 153 of them.

[3 : 0 6] 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 with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. This is God's word. Let's pray and ask for his help.

Jesus, thank you for revealing yourself to your followers. That's what we need this morning.

We need to see you. We need to live with you today. So would you, by your spirit, through your word, would you show us yourself that we might see you clearly, Jesus? We ask it in your name. Amen.

Amen. Waiting on Jesus can be really hard. Maybe you can see yourself in the stories of one of these only somewhat fictional Southwood members just this week. The names are made up, but the stories are mostly real. Maggie rushed out into the living room a few minutes behind Tuesday morning. She was balancing her coffee, her purse, and her lunch when she noticed the same toys as yesterday strewn across the floor. Couldn't the kids listen just once and help out a little? Didn't they understand all their mother did for them all on her own? No time to deal with it now? She has to get to school and teach.

The end of the year is in sight, but she can tell she's losing zeal for the kids she used to feel God sent her to love. Now she just wants to get to the end of the year. She was so encouraged on Easter.

[5 : 12] Jesus is alive. Everything is changing, but that seems in the past already. Where is Jesus? No time to think. Her phone pings with a text from a woman in her grace group.

The text reads, Maggie, I'm praying for you this morning. You're a great mom, and your heart for your kids shows me Jesus's love regularly. I hope you'll take a minute this morning to see Jesus's love for you. He is with you always. But Maggie doesn't get it. She doesn't even have a minute to pull out her phone and read the text. Off to get through another day.

Sammy woke up exhausted Tuesday morning after studying late into the night for his first AP exam. Is studying all he gets to do anymore? He was so excited on Easter about Jesus being with him as he went to tell his friends and his classmates about Jesus, just like Mary did. It was all he could think about for a couple of days. But then exams were coming, and you had to do well or the rest of your life could be ruined. He hadn't even made Bible study himself this morning, much less invited anyone else to come with him. Now, where was Jesus anyway? He didn't seem to help much with chemistry.

I've got to crush this test and be ready for the meat this afternoon. Otherwise, how will I afford to go to college next year and get a girl to like me and make enough money to feel good about myself?

Is that what I'm really living for? Well, no time to think now. I've got to take that exam. Robbie drove through the Arsenal gate Tuesday morning. Last story, I promise.

[7 : 02] Into the same parking spot, walked to the same building, and sat at the same desk as he has every day for the past 12 years. But this day feels different. At 9.30 meeting, he got the email about last night feels ominous. He's afraid. If they told him he seemed overwhelmed at work lately, he couldn't disagree. But what's really eating at him is he feels he's neglecting all kinds of people God has called him to love. His wife, his kids, his neighbors. How does anyone manage it all?

Easter was going to be the start of a new life with Jesus, but it seems like distant past now. Where is Jesus today? 15 minutes till the meeting. The Bible app's there on his phone. It's a reading today from Psalm 23 about a good shepherd, green pastures, and still waters. But Robbie opens ESPN instead. Maybe this will keep his mind off feeling so stuck. Maybe Auburn signed a 15-year-old quarterback of the future to lead them back to glory since he last checked last night. Guess not.

Well, now it's time for the meeting that could mess up everything. At least that would be a change. Waiting on Jesus. We do a lot of waiting, don't we?

It reminds us as we do how little we're in control of. So many people don't run on my schedule. It's infuriating, isn't it? It is for me. One of them is Jesus. He has his own timing. He shows up precisely when he means to. But we also avoid waiting. We really don't like it. It's hard to wait when we're used to immediate answers from Google, when we are used to living our lives with instant meals from the microwave, when we are regularly in the habit of finding quick fixes to whatever ails us on YouTube.

It's hard. But it's especially hard when we're waiting for new life with Jesus, when we feel stuck and there's something coming, and when we're waiting to live on his mission, and we're just feeling stuck and alone.

[9 : 39] Jesus' disciples knew that feeling. They have seen the risen Jesus. Yes! They're thrilled. But Jesus doesn't just sweep them away to glory and leave all the problems and struggles of this life behind, does he? Now they've gone home to Galilee at his instruction. This is where he sent them. They're reminded of that by an angel. They're promised he will meet them there. They're back in some of the same places that they were with Jesus. They're in some of the same activities they've been in, even some of the same struggles. Life is not feeling very different, is it?

Peter, in particular, is doing what he knows best. Fishing. And several others join him. There's this fishing expedition of disciples. We don't know the motives for this fishing expedition. What we do know is some of our own motives when waiting gets hard for us. They include things like busying ourselves so much in an effort not to get discouraged in the waiting for Jesus that we actually miss Jesus. Distracting ourselves from that hard process of waiting by escaping through substances, through entertainment, through whatever it is that helps me feel just a little better. Or my personal go-to, going to the things we know we can do. What we can handle on our own. I'm going to throw myself into what I'm good at. And for Peter, what's that?

Fishing. Fishing. Peter can do fishing. That's something I can handle on my own, right? While I'm waiting for Jesus. Can you feel that struggle? You ever felt like you were waiting for Jesus? Jesus has given these guys a life-changing mission. He's told them that he is sending them into the world. Just as his father sent him into the world. They're being sent on a mission. Is it possible that he is sending them out on their own? No way. He's told them that. And that is what he's coming to remind them in this interaction.

And to remind us through them. It's what we need to hear this morning. Now, we're about to jump into the passage itself. Before we do, I try really hard not to spiritualize things that the Bible doesn't tell us to. There are a lot of very practical, physical realities in this story. We need to notice them.

But we also can't miss the reality that there's more than meets the eye going on here. This is more than physical. Peter has been in a very similar situation to this before. Does it sound a little bit familiar to you? The same empty nets? The same mysterious guest giving fishing advice?

[13 : 00] The first time it happened, Jesus called Peter to follow him. And Jesus was saying to become figuratively a fisher of men. That right in the midst of Peter's daily occupation, he would pursue other people with Jesus. There is no way Peter's missing the spiritual implications here as one newly commissioned by Jesus. Jesus sends us into all sorts of places to live for him, including wherever we spend most of our time each day. For most of you, that's not fishing. How will we be successful? Will we be on our own?

No way. We dare not settle there. That's important. That's the heart of the first lesson that Jesus teaches his followers then and now. It's the absolute emptiness of relying on ourselves.

Jesus is revealing himself in this story. John's very clear what's going on. He's showing us who he is as risen king through our own need. He loves to remind us that we are dependent upon him.

The fishermen went fishing and they caught nothing. Not even just a couple little ones that they had to throw back in. Nothing. The same word, by the way, that Jesus uses to tell them in the upper room, apart from me, you can do nothing. Friends, the first step in living dependent upon Jesus is admitting that we're helpless, right? Helpless on our own to do anything that Jesus has called us to do. Love your neighbor. Obey your neighbor. Obey your parents. Repent of your sin. Share the good news. I can't do it all.

Not on my own, anyway. No way I can. Listen, you know the reason for that? A big part of that, the reason Jesus calls you to things that you can't do on your own is that Jesus doesn't want you doing life on your own. He doesn't want you living apart from him.

[15 : 33] He loves you too much for that. That's not the goal to get away from him. It's to be with him. But we so naturally gravitate towards things we think we can handle on our own, don't we?

That's why I do a lot of writing and very little roller skating. It's not safe for me. I don't do it. Even the things you know, Peter, in the places you know, with the people you know, they won't yield fruit without Jesus. Though you work hard all night, though you do what you're really good at, it won't bear fruit without Jesus. How should I handle this conflict at work? How should we parent? How should I talk to my neighbors about Jesus? Lesson one is that we easily skip lesson one. And so we often default to what we think we can handle. What if instead we started by asking Jesus for his help?

Could we try that? Does that sound like three-year-old Sunday school to you and yet also something you don't do very well? What if we asked for things that were just clearly beyond our ability? What if we were praying to him for revival in our family, in our hearts, in our church, in our city? What if we were asking something so big we knew we couldn't handle it on our own? I hope we are. One of our core commitments as a church is that we recognize our deep dependence and need for prayer.

That sounds really good when you write it down, right? We wrote that down. Good for us. But you can write that down and still it's really easy to be in a meeting and trust your own instincts and ideas. It's easy to trust a podcaster over a prayer. It's easy to trust your skills instead of your Savior. If you want your daily life to be spiritually profitable, to see God do exceeding abundantly beyond all that you ask or imagine, it begins with, I need thee every hour. Just start singing that one more often if you struggle with this.

Lesson two, the priority of relying on Jesus. Not complicated. See if I can admit that I can't rely on myself, I'm going to need someone to count on.

[18 : 18] And here's a voice coming from the stranger on the shore who first reminds them that they're empty on their own. And then he says, hey, try the other side. Maybe they hadn't thought of that, right?

Maybe there's fish over there. When they try the other side, so many fish that they can't haul them all in, right?

This huge, huge gathering of fish and two things happen immediately. John sees clearly. And Peter swims quickly. Both of those things immediately.

John was there, see that first time I was talking about three years ago? That Jesus told them where to fish and the nets were flooded with fish. John sees it. He's been there. He sees it is the Lord.

And immediately what happens? It is the Lord. And nothing else competes for Peter with the importance of that man out there on the shore. What does Peter do? Exactly what we all would do, right?

[19 : 25] Just jump out of the boat. Start swimming. It's only 100 yards. Some of us can swim that far. Nothing else matters to Peter but Jesus. It's Jesus.

Don't you love that? Do you need a little bit of Peter in you with that? He sees the right priority. Even with the fish. Y'all think about what he's been doing all night. He's been working hard.

This is what he's been working for. He's been trying to catch fish. Now all of a sudden they're all over the place. And Peter's like, I don't care. Do whatever you want with the fish. Jesus! He just jumps in the water.

Leaves all the fish behind. Listen, never let the mission of Jesus outshine the person of Jesus in your heart, okay?

Be like Peter in that. Get such a clear vision of Jesus that you never let the mission that he's called you to, what you're to do for him, outshine the importance of who he is to you, his person for you.

[20 : 28] It's why our mission here as a church starts with experiencing grace. You've got nothing to express. Nothing that you can do for Jesus until you are seeing Jesus yourself.

It has to start there. That's why a naturally self-reliant person like me, there might be one or two others in here, but there's at least one. Naturally self-reliant.

I have to start my day being with Jesus before I rush into doing things for Jesus. It's not good for my heart any other way.

You not sure what's next for you in life? Are you not seeing the fruit you expected in your labor for Jesus? Jesus, what is it that you are waiting for?

See Jesus. He's come here in so many ways today so that you will see him and that you will throw yourself out of the boat. Just go throw yourself out of the boat and rush towards him, forgetting everything else for the moment.

[21 : 36] What if you saw getting out of bed in the morning as getting out of the boat to rush to Jesus? Just him first. Be closer to him.

Be with him. Remember who he is. Get out of the boat. Jesus is here revealing himself to his disciples to assure them that they don't go forward on their own.

He doesn't want any of you to think you might jump out of the boat and find yourself with nobody else around. No, Jesus is coming to say, I'm here. I'm still with you. He wants them to see and know his resurrection presence.

His resurrection power are with them still and with us. That vision of Jesus here comes in two ways.

Two different ways that they see Jesus. First, through his own words. Are you empty on your own? Got any fish?

[22 : 40] Follow my directions. Do as I say. The word of God speaking directly to them.

Have you made space in your life for the word of God? Is there time to hear Jesus' voice? Is listening to Jesus in the Bible a priority for you?

Other times, because of our weakness or the pain of waiting or the distance that we're living from Jesus, or perhaps just because of God's beautiful, communal, relational design for us, we need someone else to help us see Jesus.

Someone else's words. Here it's John's voice, right? It is the Lord. John's voice helps Peter see. Y'all, there is no more important reason to be in a grace group, in relationships like that, than for you to help others see Jesus, and for others to help you see Jesus.

When they can't for the tears. When you can't for the discouragement. When y'all can't for the busyness.

[24 : 05] We're there for each other to help one another see Jesus and know he's there. Who often helps you see Jesus? Whose words regularly point your heart and your eyes to him?

Think of those people right now. Listen to them. Be with them more. Make it a habit. Thank them for helping you and tell them you need it more.

Text me more often. Please spend more time with me. Pray for me. Finally, Jesus reveals himself through his word, through his people, because he is with you as you seek to follow him into uncharted waters.

And finally, Jesus wants you to see him for a specific reason. He wants you to be assured of the fullness of his provision. We've already seen overflowing nets.

Yes, Jesus should get credit for those too. But then when they all get to land, it's not really about those nets, is it? Jesus already has fish on the fire and bread ready to eat.

[25 : 23] We're going to come back to the charcoal fire next week. For those of you who are already interested in that, yes, the only other charcoal fire in the New Testament is the one that Peter just denied Jesus beside.

Jesus wants to meet Peter there. We'll see that next week. But first, there are already fish. Jesus has you covered.

He's got you. He knows you need to eat. You hungry after working all night? Jesus knows your needs.

And notice the mercy in Jesus' words. Even though he has fish already, and they're probably warm, even though he was the only reason that they caught any fish, Jesus says, bring some of the fish you have just caught.

Isn't that kind? As we walk in the works that Jesus has prepared for us to do, as we share of him and his love with family and friends and neighbors, we don't save anyone, do we?

[26 : 38] Jesus died and rose for their salvation, but he gives us the joy of laboring and loving with him. We get the privilege daily if we have seen him first, if we have ourselves been with Jesus, to bring others then to Jesus.

What a great joy. Peter has to go help. There's so many fish that no one can do it in his own strength, but Jesus can contain them.

There's never too many. And he values everyone. Everyone counts. Don't try to make 153 mean more than that, please.

The point is so many, and every one of them precious to Jesus. Jesus has indeed made abundant provision so that we and many others may be full.

And there's a beautiful invitation. Let me read these two verses and then make two final points as we come to the table. Verse 12, Jesus said to them, Come and have breakfast.

[27 : 54] 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 with the fish.

Jesus serving those he's called to serve him. First Jesus took bread and gave it to them, and fish.

On the shore of the very lake, where with these very men, he took bread and fish and fed how many? 5,000 plus as they watched, and as these men standing here with him now were sent to do what?

Pick up 12 basketfuls of leftovers. You think they remembered? You think that was a memorable experience? And then they listened to him explain, He's the bread of life, who will never let you go hungry.

It's another figurative picture, right? There's spiritual food too, not only to fill our stomachs, but our souls will be satisfied. Do you see? Do you hear Jesus revealing himself again to them?

[29 : 00] There's no way these guys missed it. Back in the same place, with their same needs, and his same abundant grace, I've still got you.

There's enough, with more left over for anyone who comes. Full provision. When he's all you have, he's all you'll ever need.

And secondly, hear Jesus saying, come and have breakfast. Come eat with me. Right? Sharing a meal highlights that relational priority, doesn't it?

You're not just here to do things for me. It's not how Jesus feels about you. I've sent you on a mission to live with me.

I'm not sending you out alone. Listen, you need to know this if you're wondering. Jesus has time for you. Today. This week.

[30 : 02] Won't you respond to his invitation to come to him? To share a meal? A personal moment with him? What he'll do? He will fill you up.

Maybe in ways you don't expect. He will fill you with his gracious, full provision. And then you'll know that it's Jesus who's with you. Maybe you won't be sure until then. But when you sit with him and he fills you up, you'll know that only he can do that.

One night when my girls were younger, one of them woke up quite scared in the middle of a nightmare. She was waiting for comfort while I stumbled out of bed. And I called to her as I was coming to the room.

But you know how it is in the middle of a dream and you don't know what's going on. She didn't know if I was good or bad coming into the room. And as I got to the side of the bed, I squeezed her hand the way I often did.

And she exhaled and said, Daddy, my words and then especially my actions revealed who I was.

[31 : 11] That I was with her. That she could trust me. Right? Notice how much Jesus loves to do that for you. When you're stuck, when you're overwhelmed, when you're waiting for him to show up and change your life.

Let's be clear, he doesn't always give us the fix that we want. But he always gives us himself, which is more than enough. This was now the third time that Jesus revealed himself to his disciples after his resurrection.

That he showed up to remind his disciples who he was and that he was with them. One would have been enough, right? What? We've seen the Lord. And he keeps showing them.

He knows they're gonna need to remember. He knows their faith is gonna struggle. He knows they're weak. And Jesus loves to do this by his words and often by his actions in graciously meeting our needs beyond what we deserve to meet us and remind us to rely on him.

That's why he's showing up. To remind us of that. See, Jesus wants us to wait for him, doesn't he? Rather than despair? Rather than take up his mission in our own hands?

[32 : 29] Jesus wants us to see him always with us because he made us for himself. He doesn't want us living without him. And he wants us to pursue his mission confidently in his strength.

What a gracious God like this inviting us into his presence, filling our nets in spite of our weakness, promising to do more than we ask or imagine according to his power at work in us.

How could we fear when we go to the people and the places that he leads us to each day when he sends us and he equips those that he calls and he goes with those that he sends.

Jesus loves to reveal himself in your life so that you rely on him even in the waiting. In fact, that's a big part of this supper that he sets before us this morning that he invites us to sit and eat with him.

He's saying this morning, come and have breakfast. Look at my body and blood given for you. See me as your sacrificial king.

[33 : 51] See me as your gracious savior who provides for you personally all that you need. See me as your only hope for life, for success in whatever endeavor is before you this week, for refuge in the storm that keeps raging in your life.

See Jesus. Won't you wait on him and trust him today to give you himself to be with you right where you need him?

That's what he said to these disciples the night he was betrayed when he took bread and he broke it and he gave it to them as I ministering in his name give this bread to you.

He said take and eat. This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way after supper he took the cup and said this cup is the new covenant in my blood which is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Drink from it. All of you all of you are sinners who need forgiveness. Drink. My blood can wash it away. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

[35 : 07] Until he comes to be with you forever and in the meantime he's here he's giving you this to remember that he is with you. If you're here today and you don't look up here and see the body and blood of Jesus given to unite you to him as you trust him to be your God and king if that's not how you feel about him how you relate to Jesus don't don't come and eat and say with your actions something that is not true in your heart we would not want to ask you to do that but but I do want you to hear Jesus' invitation this morning to come to him to find rest for your souls that's so much more needful than for your stomach to be filled come to him he says we'd love to tell you more about Jesus come up here and observe come ask us to pray with you or if you're more comfortable you can stay where you are but consider the invitation of Jesus to come to him but if you do see Jesus here if you look up here and you see your savior and it makes you want to jump out of the boat it makes you want to skip all the people in line that's fine you can do that we're cool with that just to get to Jesus then don't let anything keep you from coming fall at his feet for forgiveness for strength for today for hope for tomorrow whatever it is that you need he's the one who meets it come to him it's his table it's not

Southwood's table it's not the Presbyterian churches it's Jesus' table so if you're a member of his church come and have breakfast with him let's pray and we'll eat together Jesus thank you for setting the table thank you for your abundant provision that only comes through yourself thanks for meeting with us and eating with us and reminding us of your love use these very common elements for that sacred purpose that our faith would be built up that we would go from here knowing that you don't call us anywhere on our own but with the one who gave himself for us use this in our hearts for your glory in Jesus' name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org