



from the desk of . . .

Rande Wayne Smith

D.Min., Th.M., M.Div.

#754

23 April 2017

THE RESURRECTION OF A MAN

John 21:1-19

Mark Twain (X) was an avid fisherman, & an even more avid teller of fish stories. Once, while spending a few weeks at a lakeside lodge in the woods of upper Maine, Twain was relaxing beside a crackling fire. A big, rugged stranger in a plaid flannel shirt & denim overalls came into the lodge, ambled over, & slumped into a big chair across from him.

"You look like a fisherman to me," remarked Twain, eager as always to strike up a conversation.

"Yeah," said the other man. "I fish some.

'Tain't fishin' season now, though."

"Fishing season!" laughed Twain. "Fish'll bite in season & out. If fish don't care what season it is ... neither do I!"

"Oh?" said the other man, perking up & leaning forward.

"You take a catch out of the lake today?"

"A catch?" said Twain proudly.

"More like a haul! I've got 'em on ice back in the larder!"

And he proceeded to launch into an embellished recounting of all the fish he had caught that afternoon. The more Twain exaggerated, the more interested the other man became.

"So," said the man at last, "you certainly did have yerself a good day at the lake.

Seems an awful shame I have to spoil it."

"Spoil it?" said Twain. "What do you mean? I just ... say, who are you, anyway?"

The man grinned, turned over the lapel of his flannel shirt, & revealed a gleaming badge. "I'm the state game warden, sir. Now, just who might you be?"

"Me?" Twain said sheepishly.

"Why, I'm the biggest liar in the whole U.S."

The Apostle John has chosen to close his Gospel with a fish story ... an even bigger & more amazing fish story than the one that landed Mark Twain in trouble with the game warden.

But John's fish story is true. It's significant. And it has a powerful spiritual lesson for anyone who's failed at some point in their relationship with the Lord.

So, listen now to Good News as recorded by John, to you who have gathered here at C.C.R.M. for worship. Within your hearing now comes the Word of the Lord ...

After this, Jesus appeared once more to his disciples at the Sea of Galilee. This is how it happened. Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael (the one from Cana in Galilee), the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples of Jesus were all together. Simon Peter said to the others, "I am going fishing."

"We will come with you," they told him. So they went out in a boat, but all that night they did not catch a thing. As the sun was rising, Jesus stood at the water's edge, but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Then he asked them, "Young men, haven't you caught anything?"

"Not a thing," they answered.

He said to them, "Throw your net out on the right side of the boat, and you will catch some." So they threw the net out and could not put it back in, because they had caught so many fish.

The disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Peter heard that it was the Lord, he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken his clothes off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples came to shore in the boat, pulling the net full of fish. They were not very far from land, about a hundred yards away. When they stepped ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there with fish on it and some bread.

Then Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught."

Simon Peter went aboard and dragged the net ashore full of big fish, a hundred and fifty-three in all; even though there were so many, still the net did not tear. Jesus said to them, "Come and eat." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. So Jesus went over, took the bread, and gave it to them; he did the same with the fish.

This, then, was the third time Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from death.

After they had eaten, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these others do?"

"Yes, Lord," he answered, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said to him, "Take care of my lambs." A second time Jesus said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

"Yes, Lord," he answered, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said to him, "Take care of my sheep." A third time Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter became sad because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" and so he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you!"

Jesus said to him, "Take care of my sheep. I am telling you the truth: when you were young, you used to get ready and go anywhere you wanted to; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will tie you up and take you where you don't want to go." (In saying this, Jesus was indicating the way in which Peter would die and bring glory to God.) Then Jesus said to him. "Follow me!" (John 21:1-19)

May the LORD grant that we may engage in contemplating the mysteries of His Heavenly wisdom with really increasing devotion, to His glory and to our edification. Amen

The scene is the Sea of Galilee. (X) The disciples had gone there in obedience to Jesus' command to Mary Magdalene following His resurrection. "Go & tell my brothers to go to Galilee, & there they will see me."

(Matthew 28:10)

I'm sure they thought that it would be a comforting thing to return to their old haunts. At this point they were completely confused, their world had fallen apart ... so, what could be better than doing something familiar ... fishing back home.

Much of the fishing in the Sea of Galilee was done at night. Fishermen used torches to attract the fish to the boat, & then netted them. But, even though these disciples were expert fishermen, they spent the whole night on the water & caught nothing ... certainly an unusual & disappointing experience for them.

Yet, as the account makes clear, it was the Lord's intention that they wouldn't catch anything on this particular occasion. He had something to teach them, a lesson which involved a symbol that was very familiar to them ... fish.

Failure is a demoralizing experience ... & these men had just failed miserably at the one thing they did best. But as bad as that might have been, it's nothing compared to the pain that comes when we face the fact that we've **let ourselves down**.

That brings us to Peter,
& the days that followed Jesus' crucifixion.

Talk about letting someone down. ... Can you imagine how he must have felt? Peter was a man who had, for all practical purposes, a **dead spirit**. Peter was a man who was in desperate need of a kind of **resurrection** himself.

When I speak of "resurrection," I'm thinking of his **commitment to Christ**. That was lost in the midst of his famous denial the night of Jesus' arrest. Remember? ...

3 different people had come up to him asking if he simply knew Jesus. And Peter replied ...

"I swear that I am telling the truth! May God punish me if I am not! I do not know the man!" (Matthew 26:74)

Wow! Can Peter ever be restored again? (Matthew 18:22)

Imagine with me what an updated version of Peter's resume would look like. It would list 2½ years with Jesus; various preaching assignments; some healings; food distribution experience in large crowds; occasional appointment secretary. Basic strength ... spokesman. Essential weakness ... no courage.

Can this kind of person be resurrected?

Is it even worth it?

This is one of my favorite passages of Scripture. It's so encouraging. I've gone back to it a # of times. It's a beautiful picture of Jesus meeting His disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

By now most of the disciples had seen the resurrected Jesus at least twice. (John 20:19,26) But their reactions indicated confusion, & an inability to fully comprehend what was going on. (Matthew 28:17)

It's also important to note who the "they" were in this passage. "Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael (the one from Cana in Galilee), the sons of Zebedee, & 2 other disciples" ... there were 7 in all.

Peter, Thomas, & Nathanael are the only ones specifically named. Thomas was the lone "unbeliever" when the news 1st arrived about Jesus' resurrection.

"Unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands & put my finger on those scars & my hand in his side, I will not believe." (John 20:25)

Nathanael had been the 1st to acknowledge Jesus' true identity. (John 1:49) And, we've already talked about Peter. (Don't miss the point that the 1st Church was made up of **doubters**, **deniers**, & a wide variety of **sinner**s ... who had been brought to faith by Christ.)

Anyway, baffled & confused, it's Peter who finally suggests something positive ... "I am going fishing."

This is something that he knew & understood & felt reasonably comfortable doing ... & the rest of the disciples immediately joined him. (I suspect that Bill & Steve & Brian & Harry & Bob, & some of the rest of you would have happily tagged along as well!)

When we fail at a "vocation" like the one that Jesus had called Peter to ...

what's left but to return to what we did before?

By going back to fishing Peter is saying ... "I'm a failure as a follower of Christ. I let Him down when I should have performed. So, I'm going back to what I know I can do, & do well ... fishing."

Now, if a person is a leader in spiritual matters, that same leadership will exist in moments of despair or rebellion. So, when Peter suggests a night of fishing ... everyone follows.

John, who was there, writes that it was a bad night. The experts, with experience & equipment, fail again.

It's almost an exact duplication of the story in Luke when they 1st met Jesus. (Luke 5:4-6) There must have been the feeling ... "Déjà vu, I've been here before."

(X) And all of a sudden, Jesus appears on the shore & calls to them, "haven't you caught anything?"

"Not a thing."

"Throw your net out on the right side of the boat, & you will catch some."

It's John who says to Peter, "It's the Lord!" And it's Peter who leaps over the side & frantically swims toward Jesus. He's so excited! He can't wait to get to Him! And we have this beautiful scene on the shore with the fire burning, cooking the fish, & bread.

The cold, shivering, tired men gather around. What's going on in Peter's mind? ... When was the last time that he stood around a charcoal fire? ... (*outside of Caiaphas's house the night of his denial*) (John 18:18)

Everywhere Peter goes there are reminders.

The early morning air is chilly. Fog rises off the lake. There's silence as the men stare into the fire, wondering what's going to happen next?

And then ... Jesus serves breakfast. It's an act of caring, of hospitality, of saying ... "gentlemen, I'm glad to be with you." It's completely different than those final hours in Jerusalem when everything was out of control.

This is a beautiful, calming picture of Jesus' invitation to all that have failed & are defeated, to come & join Him at the fire, away from the cold & emptiness. (Matthew 11:28) Join Him for breakfast.

He's still ready to serve. (Mark 10:45)

The conversation begins with Peter, & it involves a series of questions & answers. 3 times Jesus asks, (X) "Simon son of John, do you love me?" 3 times Peter answers, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

And 3 times Jesus responds, "Take care of my sheep."

It seems like a strange conversation, until we understand the meaning of the terms that were used in the exchange. There are several words in Greek that are loosely translated as "love." 2 of them are found here: "agape" (αγαπας) & "phileo" (φιλω).

"Agape" is the highest form of **love**. It's a love that **performs**, that **gives**. "For God loved the world so much that he gave" (John 3:16)

"Phileo" is the 2nd word for **love** used in our Scripture passage.

It focuses on **feelings** of affection & **intentions**.

So, "agape" is performance, while "phileo" deals with feelings & intentions. There's obviously quite a difference between the 2.

And once we understand that, this passage comes alive.

Jesus is asking Peter ...

"Do you love (agape/performance) me?"

Peter answers, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love (phileo/I have intentions & feelings for) you."

In addition to that question Jesus adds ... "more than these others do?" "Peter, do you still think that you love me more than all of the other disciples?"

You see, more than once Peter inferred that he did. He had stood there with good "intentions," thinking that he was Jesus' #1 supporter. He had publicly vowed ...

"I will never leave you, even though all the rest do!"

(Mark 14:29)

Since then Peter's had a chance to perform ... but didn't. In fact, his failure was more spectacular than everyone else's (1 Corinthians 10:12) ...

the greater the **intention**, the more colossal the **failure**.

Jesus wants Peter to honestly examine his heart,
& recognize where he really stands.

And for the 1st time, Peter's willing to come clean.

"Lord, you know that I ... I ... I have 'intentions' for you."

Thank you, Peter, for describing all of us. The best that can be said for each of us, most of the time, is that we have **feelings/intentions** for the Lord. But there's a huge difference between that & **performance**.

(X) "Hell is full of good intentions or desires."

"Resurrection" begins when a person stops kidding around about the true state of their love for Jesus. We'd like to claim "agape" ...

but we're more often prone toward "phileo" love.

Then Jesus says, "take care of my lambs." Notice that He doesn't say ... "lead, dominate, manage, govern, rule over, command, supervise, or intimidate." (1 Peter 5:3)

Have you ever seen someone feed a lamb? ... I grew up out in the country, & my neighbor had sheep. Sometimes a baby bottle is used with the utmost gentleness.

The "lambs" of Jesus Christ have to grow. (Hebrews 6:1) Jesus starts at the beginning with Peter. "I want you to be a feeder of the tiniest, of the most vulnerable."

The 2nd question varies little from the 1st. Jesus again uses "agape" & Peter answers with "phileo." "Lord, I have affection for you & intentions to serve you."

Now Peter says that, but he's in an embarrassing situation. He's standing there with a fishing net ... which is admitting that he's gone back to fishing for fish rather than fishing for people. (Luke 5:10)

Jesus varies His command a little this time. He says, "Take care of my sheep." The word He uses (ποιμαίνε) is a more general term, which describes the overall work of the shepherd for all the sheep, rather than just the lambs.

Now in the 3rd question Jesus changes verbs. He uses Peter's word ... "Do you (phileo) me?"

Jesus is now dealing at Peter's level of commitment.

"Peter, I accept where you are right now spiritually. I understand your intention. And as time goes on, I will help you with your performance.

That's what I'm ultimately interested in."

You see ... Jesus doesn't want simply **promises**. And that's all **Peter** had given Him up to this point. The original vow to follow Jesus, & even die for Him, had been unrealistic. (Mark 14:31) Peter's 3 denials were exaggerated also, filled with profanity. (Matthew 26:74)

Neither were really Peter. They showed him in moments of extreme stress. In this conversation we view Peter as he really is ... anxious to know Jesus, & wanting to please Him ... nothing more.

This is all that Jesus wants from him ... & us.

Jesus had given Peter the privilege of being the 1st leader of the Church. (The Acts 2:14) And there were times when Peter allowed it to go to his head & made him think bigger thoughts about himself than he should have. (Romans 12:3) But Jesus is patient with him.

Peter would look back on this moment as his own
"spiritual resurrection."

Later, he would write ...

"But after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who calls you to share his eternal glory with Christ, will himself perfect you & give you firmness, strength, & a sure foundation." (1 Peter 5:10)

The 3rd century Bible scholar, John Chrysostom (X) wrote ... "the danger is not that we should fall while fighting, but rather that, once fallen, we should remain on the ground." Peter's been on the ground,
but now he's up, resurrected by Jesus.

Some of us have fallen, but thank you Jesus ...
we have gotten up again. (The Proverbs 2:16)

The conversation ends with a frightening challenge about the future. Jesus now tells Peter something that he couldn't have understood before with just simply his good "intentions." Let me paraphrase.

"Peter, while you're young, you'll have freedom; but there's coming a time, when you're old, that you'll also suffer on a cross." John verifies that Jesus' words were a prophecy about Peter's martyrdom.

And then Jesus concludes with, "Follow me!" What makes that interesting is that several weeks before Jesus had told Peter ... "You cannot follow me now where I am going, but later you will follow me."

"Lord, why can't I follow you now?' asked Peter.
'I am ready to die for you!'"

"Jesus answered, 'Are you really ready to die for me? I am telling you the truth: before the rooster crows you will say 3 times that you do not know me.'" (John 13:36-38)

As long as Peter operated on an **intention** level, he couldn't **follow** Jesus. That could happen only after the cross, when Peter became honestly committed.

And this prophecy was historically fulfilled.

Church historian, Eusebius, is the 1st to acknowledge it. He writes about Peter traveling to Rome near the end of his life. There he was imprisoned by Nero, his hands were bound, & he was led out to the place of execution. (X) Tradition says that at Peter's request he was crucified upside down because he didn't feel worthy to die in the same way that his Lord did.

Peter once promised that he would lay down his life for Jesus. (Matthew 26:35) And here, Jesus prophetically says in effect, "Yes Peter, you will one day keep your promise & give your life for me. But you will not die as you thought you would, with a sword in your hand, defending me against the Temple guards & Roman soldiers. (John 18:10) You will be bound & led out to die just as I was. You will lay down your life, not in battle, but in martyrdom."

This is a **hope-filled** story for every follower of Jesus, who, like me, has felt **defeat**. And it's at those times that Jesus is often able to speak more **clearly** than ever before.

And through that experience there is "resurrection!"

(X) A lot of people naively say, "Oh, I love Jesus so much!" But, how do we really know if we truly love Jesus? Is it just a tender emotion that we feel inside ... or is there more to love than that?

Of course there's more, because **love** is more than a **feeling**. (1 John 3:16) If we really love God, it'll be shown in our life. "Do you love me?" Jesus asked Peter. And today He's asking us that same question. Is it "agape" (performance), or is it "phileo" (simply feelings & intentions)? What kind of love does Jesus want us to have? ... Which kind of love do you have for Jesus? ...

MARANA THA