



My Place in the Food Chain – Touchpoint for May 1, 2019

John 21:1-19 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) ¹After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. ²Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. ³Simon 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.

⁴Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." ⁶He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. ⁷That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. ⁸But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

⁹When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. ¹⁰Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." ¹¹So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹²Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. ¹³Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Jesus and Peter ¹⁵When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." ¹⁷He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt 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. ¹⁸Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." ¹⁹(He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

"Feed my sheep... Follow me."

We are now two weeks post Easter, and John's gospel is giving us a look at the resurrected life. This is the third appearance of Jesus to his disciples. John gives us a glimpse into what it means to be Easter people—people of the resurrection. It's the fulfillment of the Law and the prophets. It's the end goal of the Christian life. It's visible now in all its splendor and glory.

And what does it look like? "Feed my sheep." And to quote from the first appearance of Jesus just before this, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Apparently, the Christ of faith isn't all that different from the Jesus of history.

"Feed my sheep... Follow me." "As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

Apparently, post Easter life isn't to be that different from pre-Easter life. Before I get to today's passage, I want to go back to the first resurrection appearance in John's gospel, just before this. Jesus appears to disciples who are sitting in a closed room, behind locked doors in their own tomb of fear. Fearful and afraid of the Jewish leaders and probably the Roman authorities. Jesus appears to them. Shows them his wounds. Breathes on them the Holy Spirit because for John, Easter and Pentecost happen on the same day.

Thomas isn't with them, but arrives later. The disciples tell Thomas what they had seen, but he doesn't believe them. A week later, the disciples are again in a closed room, probably locked again, still in fear, and Thomas is with them and Jesus appears for the second time.

Did you ever wonder why they were still in fear and hiding a week later after meeting with the resurrected Lord? Shouldn't that first vision, that first appearance have changed them? Why are they still afraid? Don't you think meeting the one who conquered death would make you less afraid of the authorities? Shouldn't that have gotten them out of their tomb of fear?

OK, maybe I'm weird, but these are the things I wonder about. And then I read today's passage and "*Feed my sheep... Follow Me.*" Really, this is the post-Easter life? Feeding sheep? Certainly it was intended for something more glorious, more spectacular. I can't help but wonder if Peter didn't look at Jesus and think, "This is what I get for following you all these years? This is my reward? Feeding sheep?"

And it threw me back to the first appearance of Jesus to his disciples, and his saying to them, "*As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*" No wonder they were still in hiding. They weren't afraid of the Jews or the Romans anymore, they were afraid of Jesus!

"*As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*" Uhhh "No thank you Jesus. We saw how that worked out for you. How about you and the Father send us out differently. I'm pretty sure I don't want to be sent out like the Father sent you out. You know, maybe if we just stay hidden in this room, Jesus will go away." But alas, Jesus meets them again. And again shows them his wounds. And again sends them out. And this week, he tells them to "*Feed my sheep... Follow Me.*" Really, this is the post-Easter life? Feeding sheep? Certainly I was intended for something more glorious, more spectacular.

**I've spent my whole life trying to get to the top of the food chain,
and now Jesus is telling me I am to be the one feeding others?!?!**

A few weeks ago, I spent 12 days in Israel and Jordan. And since I don't have 300 slides to show you and bore you with, I thought I would put it into a Touchpoint for you and bore you that way.

Now, on the travel itinerary of every tour of the Holy Land is the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth where the angel Gabriel announces to Mary she will give birth to Jesus. It is an incredible building. Hundreds of feet high with a great steeple on top and mosaics and paintings of the Madonna and child, surrounding the church and inside of it. Mosaics and paintings from countries around the world.

There are 3 levels to the church. A ground floor where there is a worship space. A lower level that you walk into to see the Grotto where the Visitation of Gabriel took place. An altar with bars and a gate protecting it. Upstairs is another worship space—huge—with 4 altars, because apparently 3 altars aren't enough. An altar in the chancel, with a bigger one behind it and then 2 more altars on the right and the left of the chancel area. Hundreds of people, hundreds of tourists coming to offer worship and veneration at the sight, sitting in beautiful chairs and pews.

I then asked our guide to take us to the place where Jesus opened the scrolls of Isaiah and read his mission, vision, and purpose statement in his hometown of Nazareth. "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me and has appointed me to bring good news to the poor.*" Luke 4—look it up. "No problem," she said, "It's about a 10-minute walk from here." And off we went. Through a marketplace with rows and rows of shops. Down a back alley and into a throw-away, tiny courtyard. There we encountered a creaky metal door and above it a sign that simply read, "Synagogue" because the name of the church is the "Synagogue Church."

I wish I could tell you I took a picture of that door, but it was so unimpressive and I thought we would be seeing something more—that I didn't. Inside, dusty and dirty stone walls. One altar, and only one, that reminded me of the one we used at the elementary school where the mission church I started would worship. A flimsy lectern, and the chairs were the cheap plastic, pre-molded white patio chairs that when you sit on them—OK—when I sit on them—I'm pretty sure they are going to collapse.

Oh, and by the way, we were the only ones there for the 30 minutes we spent there. No buses. No tourists. No religious pilgrims. Empty, totally empty this site of the announcement of the vision, mission, and purpose statement of God come down to earth. Apparently, this annunciation site can't hold a candle to the other and there were lots of candles at the other.

I suppose I shouldn't have been surprised. The town folk tried to throw Jesus off a cliff after he read from Isaiah. Why should we be any more receptive? But it got me to thinking: what's the point? Seriously, what's the point—worship? Adoration? Veneration? Or following in his footsteps? I can tell you what draws in the crowds. What pulls in the tourists. And I can also tell you that it was deeply disturbing. It wasn't what I was expecting.

And it didn't get much better when we went to Capernaum the next day. More unexpectedness. Capernaum, the home base of Jesus for his ministry. Capernaum, in the land of the Gentiles. Now I want you to think about that. This supposed "Jewish Messiah" sets up his home base in Gentile country after telling his home town Nazarenes that he has come for the outsider and the Gentile. Which is why they wanted to throw him off a cliff.

This "Jewish Messiah" spends his time in Gentile towns, some of which have synagogues and some which don't. Why is a "Jewish Messiah" wasting his time there? And all this is after he is baptized by an Essene or at the very least, an ascetic, who is into camel hair clothes and a diet of locust; and then he, Jesus, runs off to eat with gluttons and drink with drunkards. And when he does finally go to the "Holy City"—Jerusalem, they look at him like he is Jed Clampett. Jesus the "Nazarene" is not a compliment. It wasn't at all what I was expecting. Way too much humanity, and not enough deity.

You know, if he was looking for adoration, veneration, and deification, he went about it the wrong way. In fact, he was so bad at it that the religious and political powers-that-be conspired against him to kill him. And so the question kept pounding away at me. What's the point? What's the point of this One who claimed to forgive, heal, and pronounce acceptance to all in the name of the Divine? What's the point of the one who lived outside of every boundary—religious, political, and common culture—so that he could proclaim the Mystery's love, grace and forgiveness for all?

Is it to build monuments of adoration, veneration and deification? Or an invitation to follow in his footsteps? Or, as someone asked me recently, and I thought this was a brilliant insight, "Why is it, we are more excited about worshipping a Jesus who DIES for us, than following a Christ who LIVES within us?"

This one who claims his mission is to the poor, the captive, the blind and the oppressed. These are the "Sheep" Peter is called to feed. The outsider, the poor, the captive. "*I was hungry and you fed ME!*" Jesus says on judgment day. Perhaps Jesus is both the Good Shepherd and the hungry sheep. Is this what Paul meant when he said "*Christ is all and in all?*" This is what it means to live a resurrected life. To live here and now with all of God's children.

Have we turned this whole life, death and resurrection thing into a belief system of worship and adoration, because deep down, we don't want to be sent into the world as the Father sent Jesus? We'd prefer to be sent to an other-worldly, after-life instead. "Let's make this whole thing about the next life rather than this one." But, as I've said before, the resurrection doesn't get us past the life and death of Jesus, it returns us to it. "*As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*" Look, I'm not saying I've got this down. It's a constant struggle.

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and now Jesus is telling me I am to be the one feeding others?!?!**

But here is where I'm at, at this point in my faith journey. If our faith expression isn't breaking down walls, and barriers, if it isn't moving us beyond our boundaries to engage with those "Gentiles" over there—out there—then I don't know who it's following, but it ain't the person I met in Nazareth and Capernaum. It ain't following the person God raised from the dead—a person who challenged every political, religious, and cultural norm for the sake of forgiving, healing, and uniting all to feed the world the good news, that all God's children, all God's sheep... BELONG!

Look, I'm not saying I have all of this down. And so before I can even begin to think I'm Peter and need to feed Christ's sheep, I think I need to recognize that I'm a sheep that needs to be fed.

Which is why this meal is so important. Here at this table I am fed by the one who has fed others, who has given himself over to all. Here at this table I am fed the "Resurrected One" who is resurrected in me and resurrects me. This is what happened to the disciples when Jesus feeds them in our passage. They are resurrected, from fearful fishermen to faithful followers.

If Jesus can be the Good Shepherd and the hungry sheep, "*I was hungry and you fed me*" then perhaps the only way I can feed his sheep is to be one of them as well, who is fed by him and resurrected by him.

"As the Father has sent me, so I send you. Feed my sheep... Follow Me"

Amen