

Video: After Easter Mission

Mission is at the heart of the resurrection story.

- The women who visited the empty tomb were sent by the angels to tell the disciples the good news.
- Mary Magdalene met Jesus and was sent by him to tell the disciples.
- The two who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus ran back to Jerusalem that night to let the disciples know what they'd discovered.
- Later, the 10 disciples told Thomas the news when he turned up later.
- And Jesus commissioned all of them to go with the good news: *"As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."* John 20:21

But how were these disciples going to be able to share this good news with others? After all, Peter had denied Jesus, all but John had deserted him, and Thomas and the rest had doubted him. How was this small, weak and fearful community going to impact the world?

It's a crucial question because we're called to take this message of Jesus to our generation. It's such good news that we must not keep it to ourselves. People need to know that because Jesus died and rose again he can save them completely!

But can people like us really impact our generation? Can we really share the gospel and see people's lives transformed? Well, yes, if we're willing to listen and obey. John 21:1-14: *"Afterwards Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way: ²Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ³"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.*

⁴Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realise that it was Jesus.

⁵He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?"

"No," they answered.

⁶He 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.

⁷Then 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. ⁸The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. ⁹When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

¹⁰Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught."

¹¹Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. ¹²Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. ¹³Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead."

1. Don't Settle for Second Best

Way back at the start, Jesus had called Peter from a life of fishing. *"Come, follow me...and I will make you fishers of men."* Matthew 4:19 Instead of catching fish, from that point on, Peter would be part of Jesus' mission. He would rescue lost people by introducing them to the Saviour.

It was an amazing call to a life that mattered eternally, that changed lives and glorified God! And Peter eagerly responded to it. *"At once they left their nets and followed him."* Matthew 4:20 He left his old life and committed himself to following Jesus.

a) Gone Fishing

So why did Peter and the others go back to Galilee where they'd come from? And why did Peter say to six of them, *"I'm going out to fish."* John 21:3?

Well, at least in part, this was in obedience to Jesus. When Jesus met the women as they came back from the empty tomb he said, *"Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."* Matthew 28:10

And so Peter and the others were back in Galilee, in obedience to Jesus' command, with the expectation that they would meet him again.

But, that doesn't explain why Peter went fishing. Maybe we should commend Peter for doing something practical to support him and the others. Maybe he was just doing what Paul did when he worked as a tentmaker during his mission

trips. He said to the church leaders in Ephesus: **“You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions.”** Acts 20:34

There is no sacred/secular divide in our Christian lives. If we’re living for Jesus, then working to feed our families and provide for our needs is just as honourable as serving in a ministry role! Paul wrote to slaves in Colosse: **“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.”** Colossians 3:23

However, I can’t help but think that Peter is stepping away from his calling here. Maybe he felt like a failure for denying his Lord. Maybe he felt like he was too weak to be able to stand for Jesus again; too powerless to serve in his kingdom. And so maybe he was going back to his old job, giving up on Jesus’ call and settling for second best.

b) Don’t Give Up

Do you know what that feels like? Jesus said: **“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”** John 10:10. He came to give us a life of purpose, meaning and fruitfulness. And if we’ve trusted in Jesus we’ve received the Holy Spirit to lead us into truth and equip us for service.

But sometimes we can feel like giving up. Maybe not giving up believing in Jesus, but giving up on our dream of passionately living for him, of fulfilling his call for us to serve him in a way that makes a difference.

Instead of being in the centre of God’s will, when we struggle with failure, disappointment or doubt, we can be tempted to settle for second best. Retreat from the battle, back to our comfort zone, to a life less radical, less challenging.

This is something I’ve often battled with. When we were coming to the end of our Bible College course, I didn’t feel able to be involved in what God was calling us to. Instead I wanted to go back to Biochemistry, back to what I knew, what I felt I could do.

And over the years since then, I’ve often felt like that. When times get hard and I feel like a failure, I’m tempted to retreat and go back to what I knew before.

And maybe you’ve felt the same. Have you ever felt too messed up to serve God as he’s called you to. Or maybe too old, or too young? Too quiet, too inexperienced, too ill, too busy? Have you swallowed the Devil’s lie that who you are or the circumstances that you’re in mean that you need to settle for second best?

Of course, living for Jesus is tough. But we don’t need to give up. We don’t need to settle for second best. **“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”** Galatians 6:9

2. Remember The Power Of Jesus

That’s because Jesus won’t give up on us. Jesus wasn’t going to leave Peter on the reject pile. Yes Peter had failed, but he was not a failure. Jesus’ broke into Peter’s fishing trip that day to tell him that he did not need to settle for second best and to show him how he would be used in God’s kingdom.

Peter and the others didn’t have a successful night fishing. **“That night they caught nothing.”** John 21:3 This was not punishment for Peter’s denial or because he went fishing. This was not a sign of God’s anger with him..

Instead this was an act of love – because through this Jesus was going to teach them a crucial lesson. Through this emptiness, Jesus wanted to help them step into his fullness.

Often in our lives we can be tempted to think that emptiness and loss are signs of our failure or God's displeasure. But rather we need to realise that in everything God is working for our good! He is always for us. He is always seeking to help us to grow closer to him, in our knowledge of him and to become more like him.

But at the time, this must have been frustrating— especially for Peter and the sons of Zebedee. They were supposed to be professional fishermen. They were experts on the Sea of Galilee. But they caught nothing.

Then to make matters worse, someone over on the shore shouted out to them, **“Friends, haven’t you caught any fish?”** John 21:5

Nobody on board knew who it was. Maybe it was the distance. Maybe it was because it was still dark. Maybe Jesus, again, was just hiding his identity from them.

But whatever the reason, I don't think they would have liked the question. They wouldn't really want to publicize their failure to catch anything.

a) A Miraculous Catch

It was then that the man on the shore shouted back the most unusual order: "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." John 21:6.

Now I don't know much about fishing. I did a bit when I was a kid, but that was years ago. But I'm pretty sure that if you're not catching anything on one side of the boat, it won't make any difference to change to the other side.

It made no logical sense. How could someone a hundred yards away know where the fish were? And after all, weren't Peter, James and John experienced fishermen? They didn't need advice from some random guy on the beach!

And yet for some reason they listened. Maybe just out of frustration they threw the net on the other side of the boat. And "When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish." John 21:6

This was a massive catch. 153 large fish to be exact! Some people have tried to find some meaning in this number. I think it is just that John recorded this number because when a fisherman gets such an extraordinary catch, you want to count them and tell people!!

b) An Amazing Revelation

But before they could get them to shore, John had an amazing revelation. He turned to Peter and said, "It is the Lord." John 21:7

Of course it was. Who else could do something like this? Who else could fill empty nets? After all, this was not the first time that Jesus had done something like that.

A few years earlier, Peter and Andrew had worked all night and caught nothing. The next day, Jesus had used their boat as a floating platform to speak to the crowd. Then he turned to them and said, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." Luke 5:4

It was the wrong time of day to fish. And they'd just cleaned their nets. But because Jesus had told them to, they obeyed. And when they did, they caught so many fish their boats nearly sank.

So no wonder John recognised who it was on the shore. Jesus was doing what he'd done before, so they could recognise him. But also so they could remember what he'd taught them.

c) An Important Lesson

These miracles were important lessons about the key to effectiveness in their lives.

- On their own, depending on their own ability and strength, they experienced nothing but emptiness and frustration.
- But when they listened to Jesus and obeyed him, their nets were filled beyond their wildest dreams.

And this was how they could be effective in their ministry.

- If they tried to serve God depending on their own strength, ideas and abilities, then they'd always experience emptiness and frustration.
- But if they listened to Jesus and sought to obey him in everything they did, then they would ultimately experience effectiveness and fruitfulness.

This is what Jesus had taught them in the Upper Room, before he went to the cross: "If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:5

Without Jesus, we'll accomplish nothing that will be of lasting value. Relying on our own resources, dedication or hard work, we'll produce no fruit for God. On our own we don't have the power to follow God's commands, to serve him or to impact this world. On our own we can't change ourselves, never mind anyone else!

But if we want to be fruitful in our lives - if we want to increasingly become like Jesus, live out his purpose and plan, be involved in his mission of bringing people to himself, if we want to honour God with our lives - then we need to remain in him.

Fruitfulness in our lives is not dependent on our background, intelligence, education or experience. It is simply the result of remaining in Christ and Christ remaining in us.

d) A Patient Teacher

And this lesson was so important that Jesus taught Peter and the others this twice. He taught them this at the start of his time with them, and at the end!

Jesus didn't need to do this. Peter and the others should have got it first time. But out of love Jesus reinforced this lesson because **"Love is patient."** 1 Corinthians 13:4

And that is so encouraging for us. Often we don't fully grasp God's truth the first time we hear or see it. Or the second or the third. We often need to hear God's truth again and again before it sinks into our hearts. That's why Paul told Timothy: **"Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction."** 2 Timothy 4:2

And that is especially the case with this lesson on the key to fruitfulness. We so easily fall back into either

- Self-confidence – thinking that we can do it on our own!
- Self-condemnation – thinking that we're so bad we'll never be able to fulfil God's plan for our lives!

And so again and again we need to be reminded to put our confidence in the Lord, to say with Paul, **"I can do everything through him who gives me strength."** Philippians 4:13

3. Spend Time With Jesus

This is the key to fruitfulness in our lives. It is by living constantly in relationship with Christ, depending on him, trusting him, listening to his words, living in his love and following his commands. It is living with Christ as the centre.

And this is what Jesus invited Peter and others to experience here.

Peter was so excited to see Jesus that he jumped into the water and swam to shore. The other disciples followed in the boat, dragging the net behind them. **"When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread."** John 21:10

In an act of loving service Jesus had provided them everything that they needed. He'd built a fire to help them to dry off and warm themselves. He'd provided them bread and fish to satisfy their hunger – even although he allowed them to contribute with what "they" had caught!

But most of all, he'd provided himself. He invited them to have fellowship with him: **"Come and have breakfast."** John 21:12

The fire was warm. The food was welcome. But what made this time so special, was the fellowship with Jesus! This is what would sustain them and empower them throughout their ministry.

On their own, they would have accomplished nothing. But because they were partners with Christ, filled with his love, listening to his Word, obeying his commands, sharing his truth, depending on his power – they took the gospel to this world and saw thousands of lives transformed.

Conclusion

And this is what will sustain us and empower us in our ministry too.

On our own we can accomplish nothing. We can't effectively take the message of Jesus' death and resurrection to anyone.

But if we're willing to partner with Christ, spend time with him, remain in his love, listen to his Word, obey his commands, share his truth, depend on his power, then we can take this gospel to our generation. And God will use you and I to bring men and women and young people into a saving knowledge of Christ, to his honour and his glory!