

DEVOTIONAL 14



CHRIST  
CHURCH

# JOHN 21:15-25

<sup>15</sup> When 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.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.”  
<sup>16</sup> 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.”<sup>17</sup> 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.”  
<sup>18</sup> 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.”<sup>19</sup> (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.”

<sup>20</sup> Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, “Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?”<sup>21</sup> When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord, what about this man?”<sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!”  
<sup>23</sup> So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?”  
<sup>24</sup> This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.  
<sup>25</sup> Now there are 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.

# DAY 1

JOHN 21:15-17

<sup>15</sup> When 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.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” <sup>16</sup> 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.” <sup>17</sup> 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.”

Major unexpected events in our lives leave us feeling dislodged, disoriented. Something you have experienced may come to mind. But seeing the Promised Messiah—who came to reveal his kingdom and who taught people about God and healed their diseases—hanging on a cross in ignominy goes beyond our categories of unexpected occurrences. The disciples’ hopes were dashed, their emotions plunged to the depths! But then, as they struggled to absorb a crucifixion, they heard news of a resurrection. Could it be true? Was Jesus really alive? From indescribable depths of despair and sorrow, they are raised to heights of joy, a joy that transcends what we expect in this world. Nothing could ever be the same again! Now what? How will they start again? And now the amazing events are past, and they need to figure out what to do with their ordinary days.

The setting for Jesus’s encounter with Peter was his finding some disciples fishing. We are not given details about why they were fishing. Were they looking for something familiar to stabilize their world? Were they back to earning a living for their families? Were they finding a way to be together? Whatever their reason, Jesus knew where they were and wanted to meet them in their places of need. But even more important, Jesus was still on mission. He still had work to do before he could return to his Father. He would be leaving soon, entrusting his mission to these men. Jesus had already been training Peter for leadership. He had already forgiven him for his betrayal, but he now needs to reach the depths of his heart, the center of his soul, so that Peter can freely and boldly lead with no pangs of conscience. Jesus’s first concern is not Peter’s feelings, but his heart; Peter has to know that the first qualification for leadership is an unrivaled love for Jesus.

Peter had already experienced Jesus’s truth-telling when he heard him say, “Get behind me, Satan.” He saw Jesus correct his impulsive reaction in the garden. But more than these, he could never erase Jesus’s look after the rooster crowed. Peter was overcome with guilt and shame for an action he could never undo; he had betrayed the one he loved most; he

deserved condemnation. But Jesus's look said, *Peter, Peter, this is who you are, but I am so sorry you had to find out this way. I tried to warn you, but you refused the light.* Jesus's loving, truthful look showed Peter that his denial was the result of a proud heart that had refused the light.

Having already met Jesus at least twice since the resurrection, Peter would have known personal forgiveness. But Jesus cannot entrust the leadership of the newborn church with someone who has not been cleansed of all pride, presumption, and self-trust. Peter had to come to the end of himself before he could wholly submit to Jesus as Lord. So Jesus asked a penetrating question three times: "Peter, do you love me?" He had to look deeper into his soul each time, as Jesus gave him the opportunity to affirm his love as many times as he had denied him. Now Peter can be commissioned to take up his call to be a shepherd who nourishes and tenderly cares for young and old in his flock. He has been publicly affirmed and reinstated before his peers. Peter is prepared for his call.

Maybe we are asking some of the disciples' questions. We have just celebrated a high and holy day; Easter joy filled our souls. But now we are back in our familiar places with the same difficult circumstances and irritating people. How can the resurrection transform these places? As Jesus was with his disciples then, he meets us through his word, his spirit, and his people. Faster than texting, he hears when we call. And it is not in some unrealized ideal place, but in the place he has actually put us—the place where we are tested, pruned, and encouraged—that we look more and more like Jesus.

How is the reality of the resurrection changing life for you? What is Jesus calling you to do?

Read Peter's letter to believers written as an old man (1 Peter) and reflect on how obedience over a lifetime transforms us into Christlikeness.

## **PRAYER**

*Risen Lord, we are filled with the great and good things you have done! And now we ask you to strengthen us for the work you have for us to do. Please cleanse us from the pride and self-trust that takes your place in our hearts, and show us how to experience the power of your resurrection as we walk through our days. We love you for promising never to leave or forsake us. Jesus, you are worthy of anything we could give you. We give ourselves again for your glory. Amen.*

# DAY 2

JOHN 21:15-17

<sup>15</sup> When 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.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” <sup>16</sup> 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.” <sup>17</sup> 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.”

As we observed yesterday, Jesus meets Peter (and by extension us) through the use of penetrating questions meant to illumine our hearts. That the Lord would penetrate our hearts is very much the prayer of David in Psalm 139, *Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!* (vv.23-24). What Peter needed to learn, and what we need to learn, is how to sit still and allow God to perform this desperately needed surgery on our hearts.

Each time Jesus asks Peter, “do you love me?”, Peter responds with “you know that I love you”. What I find significant here is that Peter defers to Jesus in terms of diagnosis. Rather than being defensive or insisting on proving himself or validating his own honor, Peter submits to the cut of the Savior, because he knows it is a cut intended to heal. Author Susan Johnson writes about what she calls the “demon dialogues” that we use in relationships to defend ourselves in the midst of conflict. She identifies the Freeze and Flee, the Protest Polka, and Find the Bad Guy as moves we make to evade and avoid healthy resolution. As much as we do this with others, we also do this with God. We protest that sin is not as bad as it seems, we seek to freeze God out of our life, or we place the blame on others, even God himself. In contrast, Peter here leans into the heart surgery that the Savior is performing and leaves himself in the Savior’s skillful hands. Lord, you know ... Peter is vulnerable, open, and meek.

Peter learns here a most important lesson, namely that grace flows downhill. He recognizes that inviting the searcher of hearts in to illumine our darkness means giving up depending on ourselves and placing our hope in Christ who is our righteousness.

## **PRAYER**

*Lord we need your help today to even discern our sin. Help us like Peter to sit still and to allow you to do the work required. Take away our defensiveness, our protests, and our evasions. May stop depending on our own righteousness and throw ourselves on yours. Lead us in the way everlasting that you have secured! May this Gospel be our pride and joy, today and everyday. We pray all in Jesus Name. Amen.*

# DAY 3

JOHN 21:18-23

<sup>18</sup> 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.” <sup>19</sup> (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.”

<sup>20</sup> Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, “Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?”

<sup>21</sup> When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord, what about this man?” <sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!” <sup>23</sup> So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?”

Imagine that you knew how you were going to die, but not exactly when? Would that be a comfort to you? Would it be disconcerting? This is exactly the place that the apostle Peter finds himself after this encounter with Jesus, for, as John notes, this exchange told Peter, and the others, the manner in which Peter was to die. As best we can tell from history, Peter lived for over 30 years with this knowledge! What are some things we can observe in this exchange?

- First, faithful discipleship does not equal an easy life or death. Having your “hands stretched out” was a well-known way of speaking of crucifixion. Peter here is told the manner in which he was to die. Tradition has it that he was indeed crucified, though upside down because he did not feel worthy to die exactly as his Master.
- Second, difficulty in life does not negate the call to follow Jesus. Two times in this passage, Jesus affirms the call to Peter to follow him, no matter what the cost. If you remember, “Follow me” were the first words that Jesus used to initiate his relationship with Peter (cf. John 1:43). That call never goes away.
- Third, we all have the opportunity to glorify God in our death. As we come to the end of our life, no matter the manner in which the end approaches, we are to cling to Jesus and seek his glory in facing the defeated enemy of death. In faithful living and faithful dying we bring glory to God.

- Fourth, each of us has our own journey. Upon hearing his future, Peter seeks to know John's future. Jesus refocuses him by saying, "What is that to you? YOU, follow me." It is easy to get caught up in comparing ourselves to others. It is easy to feel sorry for ourselves or to be envious of others. Jesus here reminds us that each of our stories are unique, and each of us are called to be faithful in our own lane.

There is a lot in this passage, but lest we lose heart in the "what" that this passage demands of us, let's not forget the "who" we are called to follow. For in the end, as it was in the beginning, Jesus, the Alpha and the Omega, our champion and our friend, is the one who is doing the calling. His call to follow him is also a promise that he will be with us wherever we go. It is a reminder that we do not face anything that he has not faced. We are to follow, but he will never leave us or forsake us!

## **PRAYER**

*Lord Jesus, we don't have the same details that Peter did about how our life will end, but we do have the same call to follow you. We pray today for the strength and the grace to face those things that you have ordained to be part of our story. Holy Spirit, in our living and in our dying, we pray that you would help us to keep our eyes on Jesus, our champion and our friend. We pray all this in Jesus's name. Amen.*



# DAY 4

JOHN 21:15-17

<sup>15</sup> When 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.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” <sup>16</sup> 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.” <sup>17</sup> 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.”

In John 21:19, we see Jesus renew Simon Peter’s call to follow him. Such a simple command that calls Peter back to the beginning of Christ’s ministry. But before Jesus reminds Peter of that calling, he reinstates Peter and gives him a new mission. In this new mission, Jesus shows Peter and us that Jesus’s work was and is for more than just a few people. Jesus calls on Peter to keep and shepherd the sheep of his flock. As Jesus is the shepherd of all his sheep, he gives Peter the work of looking after them while the master is away.

We know that Jesus keeps those who are his. There is no way in which we are ultimately and finally responsible for one another because we have the full assurance that our faith—no matter how uneasy or wavering—is the instrument that God uses to bring us to him. But still we have Jesus giving Peter a new work, tending to the well-being of God’s children.

Three times we see Peter affirm his love for Jesus, and every time we see Jesus turn Peter toward the sheep. The implication is a very direct one. Just as faith without works is a dead faith, so too if we love our Lord, we will also love and care for those who are his.

Peter was cut deep by Jesus’s interrogation of him. He was being chastised by the Lord, called to repentance. And Peter knows that the Lord knows him deeply, as he says the final time, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” How well we are reminded that our God knows each and every one of us well from our beginning, and even in our sin and misery he loved us and gave himself up for us. Just as Peter was reminded of his shortcomings, we too can see and be humbled in our fallen state. In this humility we love one another without pride or selfish motives.

As Jesus redeems Peter from his denial of the Lord, he also directs him to new duties, a new calling. This calling reminds us that we who are one with Christ are not alone. Rather, we are members of the same body. There is a special and primary calling for our pastors and elders here that we see to be the undershepherds of Christ. But this in no way reduces our calling as brothers and sisters in Christ as we speak of God's Word to one another and share in life's daily demands.

In our love for Jesus and his love for us, we are called once again to care for one another. Forgive one another. Love one another. To teach and be taught by one another from the Word of God. Not only does Jesus bring Peter to himself, he calls Peter to the body that is growing and following the Way, Christ.

Just as the vine does not have one branch and the body does not have one limb, so too we are reminded that we are not alone in our faith. We have been called by God to be members in Christ of one another together. We grow together; we are not alone, isolated from one another. Even though at times it can feel that way.

Rest in the assurance that God is the God who hears and who sees. Pray for eyes to see and ears to hear those who need to be seen and heard. Just as Peter was called to feed the sheep in his time, so too we are called to carry one another's burdens. In confidence, we can turn to one another and our Lord when we face times of need.

## **PRAYER**

*Lord, you have ignited in us a fire for you. You have given us the Holy Spirit that we might love our fellow sheep well. Give us the eyes to see and the ears to hear who needs feeding and tending. Give us confidence in you and patience with one another to reach out when we so often need help. May we bear one another up before you, Father, in the name of the Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

# DAY 5

JOHN 21:24, 25

<sup>24</sup> This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

<sup>25</sup> Now there are 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.

It is probably safe to say that the first Bible verse most of us learned was John 3:16. Similarly, probably the first song many of us were taught was “Jesus Loves Me.” Now as we come to the conclusion of a season studying John’s gospel, that theme of God’s love for us through Christ should be our big takeaway. In John’s other New Testament writings, namely his epistles and Revelation, that theme of God’s love is directly integral to his whole message. In his gospel, John uses metaphors that are very clear. God loves us so much that he always goes to the greatest lengths imaginable to help us understand the depth and breadth of his love.

The I AM passages serve that end by showing us how much God loves us as he comes to us to meet our needs. Each of those I AM names points to both spiritual and physical needs we have that Jesus meets. He is the Vine so we can grow in him and be fruitful. He is the Good Shepherd, both protecting and leading us. He is the Living Water and the Bread of Life that nourishes us and makes us healthy. He is the Light that illuminates our path as we find the way we should live. Knowing that we live in him who is the beginning and the end means we always have an identity in an often confusing and disorienting world.

We greatly benefit from John’s experience with Jesus those three years. He had a front-row seat to the Lord’s teaching to the multitudes in Galilee. He personally witnessed the miracles of Jesus. He saw the controversy with the Jewish authorities as Jesus reclarified God’s call to Israel. He also likely had many individual and intimate conversations with Jesus as the master disciplined him. He was there at the cross when Jesus died. He was one of the first to see the empty tomb. He was in the upper room when Jesus appeared to the disciples and then on the Mount of Olives as Jesus ascended.

Then as the only disciple who lived out his life to old age, he also saw how the church developed and grew during its first 50 years. He witnessed and experienced the coming and indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the disciples, which changed them totally from a rag tag group to an apostolic brotherhood that took the gospel to the known world. He saw the church becoming the body of Christ that would continue the Lord’s ministry. He saw the church become the agent of love that was turning the world upside down.

So it is no surprise that when he gets to the end of his gospel, he says for once and for all, *“These things I have written are accurate and true, but they are only part of the story. The full story is even bigger than any of us can even imagine.”* This wonderful Jesus John writes about is our loving Savior, our Lord and our King.

## **PRAYER**

*Father, awaken our hearts and minds to all that you are and how much you love us. Fill us with wonder at the awesomeness of who you are and how you minister to us. May all these ideas not be abstractions, but may they be personally understood and held beliefs that shape and influence our behavior each day. Help us respond to that love in bringing it to others as you have commanded. May you be glorified in our lives as we tell others of your love for them.*