John 20:1-14

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[0:00] So, Jesus rose from the grave. He is our risen Lord. But what is He like, this risen Lord?

How does the risen Lord relate to His disciples? How does He relate to you and me as His disciples?
This evening, I want us to meet the risen Lord as we consider one of His appearances to His disciples following His resurrection.
And we're going to read in John's Gospel in chapter 21, reading verses 1 to 14. And following the reading, we'll consider what we discover, what we learn in this passage concerning how the risen Lord relates to His disciples and what encouragement and lessons there are for us in this passage.
So, reading in John chapter 21 from the beginning to verse 14. Afterwards, Jesus appeared again to His disciples by the Sea of Tiberias.
[1:19] It happened this way. Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathaniel from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together.

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.
Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.
He called out to them, Friends, haven't you any fish?
No, they answered. He 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.
Then 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.
[2:20] The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it and some bread.

Jesus said to them, Bring some of the fish you have just caught. Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three.
But even with so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, Come and have breakfast. None of the disciples dared ask him, Who are you?
They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.
The Word of God. The manner in which Jesus relates with his disciples, as it is described for us here in this passage, is revealing and heartwarming.
[3:33] And we will, in a moment, explore this matter of how Jesus relates to his disciples. But before we do that, just very briefly, by way of introduction, I suppose, I want to ask the question of what we make of this fishing expedition described here in this chapter.

And I suppose the intriguing question that has been posed many times is not a very original question. The intriguing question is whether we can read anything into the mood or indeed commitment of the disciples by their return to their nets.
Now, as I say, the question has been posed. And as it has been posed many times, inevitably, there have been many answers. And some are quick to condemn the disciples for this fishing expedition as demonstrating a lack of commitment, a lack of focus as to the task that they had to hand, the calling that they had been given.
Others rather praise their industry as they waited for the day of Pentecost to be busy and occupied and productive. And so they are praised by others.

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Now, I don't think we're going to come to a conclusion on this question. And it's not really that important a question. But as we just explore it briefly, I think it's fair to say that charity demands that we be slow to condemn.
[5:11] That's always a good rule in life, that we be slow to condemn. And certainly, on this occasion, there are good reasons for not condemning. There is, of course, nothing wrong per se with going fishing.

I don't see any attraction in it myself, getting cold and wet for several hours. And then today, people just throw the fish back in. I really don't see the attraction in it at all.
But of course, that's by the by. There's nothing, of course, wrong with fishing in and of itself. More importantly, in all this account, Jesus gives no indication of displeasure at this fishing trip that Peter and his friends were involved in.
And it is also true, as we've just hinted at a moment ago, that while the disciples have been commissioned to a greater mission, we might say, they are in a strange waiting period until the day of Pentecost and the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
That, in a sense, in their favor or in their defense. However, having said all that, and having also said that we should be slow to criticize and condemn, it does seem to me, or at least I could speak of a sneaking suspicion, that this trip does reveal at least a wavering or an uncertainty as to their calling.
[6:44] We've read of how Peter and Andrew were called by Jesus. There in Matthew's Gospel in chapter 4, we read the passage earlier on. And in that same passage, it speaks of two of the other companions on this fishing trip, the sons of Zebedee.

So, at least four of the men who were involved in this fishing trip, we've read of their calling three years previously. And very particularly, we have in our mind the memorable way in which Peter and Andrew were called to be fishers of men.
The obvious and very memorable contrast. Until now, you have been fishers of fish, but now, as of now, you will be fishers of men.
And yet here we find Peter in the middle of a lake fishing fish. And remember also that this call to serve the Master that they had first heard at the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry has already been confirmed by Jesus.
following His resurrection. And again, we read the passage in the previous chapter of John's Gospel, where very clearly and very explicitly, Jesus confirms to them, indeed gives greater content to their calling.
[8:06] As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. And with that, He breathed on them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.

Understood as a call, in very vivid terms, to preach the gospel that opens the door of salvation to those who would hear and respond.
So this calling has been confirmed even just in these days that have been passing. And I wonder, and again, here all we can do is wonder, because it would be unfair to reach a conclusion, but I wonder if their failure to catch anything was, in any sense, a message for them.
So even though they were perhaps quite innocent in their going out to fish, that there is significance in that they didn't catch anything, certainly not until Jesus intervenes. Well, maybe yes, maybe no, there is significance in that.
Well, I'm sure there is significance, but what exactly it is, I'm reluctant to state categorically. Notice also, before we move on to our major concern, which is to consider Jesus and how He relates to the disciples, but notice also the manner in which this fishing trip is born.
[9:29] It doesn't appear to have been a measured conversation between the disciples, where they sit down and say, well, what should we do as we wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit?

Do we—is there anything we should be involved in? Are there some task that we should be performing? And so they discuss it and debate it and come to the conclusion that fishing would be a reasonable and an acceptable activity.
No, rather we have Peter, it would seem quite abruptly, deciding what he's going to do. We read there in verse 3, I'm going out to fish.
Simon Peter told them. He's decided that's what he's going to do. I don't know about you lot, but I'm going out to fish. He doesn't invite them to join him. He just says, that's what I've decided to do. I'm

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fed up of just sitting here doing nothing.
I'm going out to fish. And the others think, well, we'll go with you. And that's, as we're told, the others determined that they would accompany Peter.
[10:32] We will go with you was—or other words that they use in response. Should they have gone fishing?

Are they wavering in their convictions? Well, we simply don't know the answer to that question. But what we can do, and more helpfully and more importantly, is move on to the manner in which the risen Lord relates to these disciples.
And consider what this teaches us about how he relates to us as his disciples. The first thing that I want you to notice is that the risen Lord wants us to know him more and more.
There in verse 1 of chapter 21, we read in the New International Version, which is the version we are using or have as the church Bible, we read, afterwards Jesus appeared again to his disciples by the way of Tiberias.
It happened this way. Now, while this is a reasonable and a legitimate translation of the original, it is unfortunate in that it does seem to hide the significance of what is being said in this verse.
[11:49] As matter-of-factly, we are told that Jesus appeared to them again. He'd appeared to them before, and now he appears to them again. It doesn't seem to be great significance in that.

The English Standard Version captures what is being said in this verse, I think, more helpfully. And I'm going to read it for you. There, the translation rather is as follows.
After this, Jesus revealed himself again to his disciples, and he revealed himself in this way. And I say that's more helpful because the verb that is used here in verse 1 of chapter 21 does carry the idea of manifesting truth about himself.
It's not simply saying that Jesus appeared, much like I might appear at your house or you might appear at my house one fine day. No, the verb implies that this appearance has as its purpose, has as its intention to teach something about himself.
He appears with that intention of revealing truth about himself to his disciples. He wants his disciples, Jesus the risen Lord, wants his disciples to know him and to know him better.
[13:07] They already know him. They know him quite well. But Jesus wants them to know him better. He wants them to learn something new.

Hence the helpful translation in the English Standard Version when it says not only that he appeared to them, but he now appeared to them in this way. He had appeared to them in other ways.
On other occasions he had revealed truth concerning himself, but now he appears with more news or more truth concerning himself that he wants them to understand.
And of course, nothing has changed fundamentally. The manner in which Jesus reveals himself, manifests himself to us, may well be different to the manner in which he manifested himself to the disciples.
But the desire to be known, the desire to be known, the desire to be known, the desire that we, his disciples, would know him and know him better, remains a constant.
[14:10] Jesus wants you to know him better. Jesus wants you to discover new truths concerning who he is, certainly to understand truths concerning who he is in a better and in a deeper way.

He wants you to know him better than he is.
He wants you to know him better than he is. He wants you to know him better than he is. He wants you to know him better than he is. He wants you to know him better than he is. So, that's one thing that I want to notice concerning the risen Lord, that he wants us, he wants you to know him more and more.
But a second thing we discover in this passage is that the risen Lord deals gently with us. Yes, he is the one who has risen from the grave. Yes, he is the one who has been exalted to the highest place.
Yes, he is the one who enjoys all authority on heaven and on earth. And yet, he deals gently with us. He certainly dealt gently with the disciples who were on this fishing expedition.
[15:37] There in verse 5, we read, Now, we know what has been going on in the previous hours.

The disciples have spent the whole night fishing and nothing. There is great discouragement, I imagine. They are frustrated at their lack of success.

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All night, for nothing. No result. Nothing to show for all their efforts. And I wonder how they feel. Well, we don't need to be very clever to imagine how they would feel in those circumstances.
What does Jesus do as he approaches them? Does he reprimand them or scold them for wasting their time fishing? Well, certainly not. We haven't even decided that it was untoward for them to be fishing.
How does he treat them? He treats them so, so very gently. And again, I have to say the translation that we have in the NIV is not as helpful as it might be.
[16:42] The word that we have there in verse 5 that describes the address of Jesus is friends. Friends, haven't you any fish? Now, the actual word that is used, the word in the original, is the word paideia, which is a Greek word which means literally children.

That's what it means. It means children. What Jesus said on this occasion was, Children, haven't you any fish? Or actually, haven't you anything to eat? Children.
Why then this translation friends? Well, it would seem that the word children could be used colloquially to mean friends. And so, it's not wrong to have friends as a translation, but it seems more helpful to maintain the actual word that Jesus used, which, as I say, literally means children. And many other versions opt for maintaining or using that word children. Haven't you any fish? Here are these grown men going about the business that they knew so well.
And Jesus, from the shore, cries out to them, Children, haven't you any fish? There is a gentleness and a tenderness in his approach to these frustrated, discouraged, confused disciples.
[18:02] I wonder how you feel, even this evening. And certainly, in the course of your life and Christian walk, is it not the case that you, too, with the disciples are often discouraged, perhaps often confused?

What should we be doing? Is this what I should be doing? Should I be doing something else? Frustrated when a plan that you have had doesn't come to fruition? Things don't go as you had hoped.
And they were worthy plans. They were genuine intentions, but things haven't worked out. Maybe you're concerned that you've taken a wrong turning.
You're doing what you ought not to be doing. Maybe you're unsure as to what you should do in the future. Well, as the risen Lord deals gently with these discouraged and perhaps confused disciples, so he continues to deal gently with you and with me, as he would direct you in the way that you should go.
The risen Lord wants you to know him more and more, better and better, and he will deal gently with you as he helps you get to know him better and better.
[19:19] But there's a third thing I want to notice here in this passage concerning the risen Lord, and it's this. The risen Lord directs us and provides for us even when we don't realize or ask for his help.

We read there in verse 6, the dialogue, if we can call it a dialogue, the dialogue begins with Jesus addressing the disciples, children, haven't you any fish?
Their answer is a very short one, which I think in a measure reveals what they're feeling. No, no, they answered.
And then Jesus responds to them, throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some. And of course, we know what happens when they did. They were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.
Now the question is this, and it's a very simple question. When Jesus gives his directions to the disciples, do they know who is speaking to them? When he says to them, throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.
[20:24] At that point, do the disciples know who it is? Well, they don't. That's made abundantly clear. They don't know who it is who's giving them this direction. They don't know who this stranger is who is speaking to them.

It's at the break of dawn. There is some distance between the boat and the shore. It seems reasonable that the reason for them not recognizing Jesus is simply for that, for that reason.
He's too far away and it's still not light. Whatever the reason for them not recognizing him, they don't. They don't know who it is. It rather begs the question why they pay any attention at all to this stranger.

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They've been fishing all night, and here the stranger comes and tells them to do this rather strange thing, and they do follow his instructions. Again, that's maybe a question that we have to simply accept we don't have an answer to.
But what we do know is that Jesus is helping them, and they are blissfully unaware that it is the Lord who is helping them.
[21:33] And isn't there a great and an encouraging truth there for us? Nothing has changed. The risen Lord is ever helping his disciples.

He's ever helping you. He's ever helping me, even when and often when we aren't even aware that it is him. He's helping us in so many ways, and we don't know.
We don't realize. He's often helping us perhaps through other people. On this occasion, it was indeed Jesus, though he wasn't recognized. Perhaps in our circumstances, it will be through the most unlikely people.
Perhaps people who know nothing of Jesus. Indeed, in so many ways, Jesus is helping us, even when we don't recognize that it is him.
Jesus is much nearer to you than you realize. Certainly, that was true for these disciples. He was very near to them, but they were blissfully, if indeed blissfully, certainly unaware that that was so.
[22:40] So, the risen Lord directs his disciples, provides for his disciples, even when we don't realize, even when we don't ask for his help.

He is ready to grant us his help. But there's a further thing that I want us to notice, and it is this, that the risen Lord values and uses all of his disciples different though we are.
As we continue going through the passage in verse 7, we read then the disciple whom Jesus loved, a clear reference to John.
We've already been told that the sons of Zebedee were part of this expedition. We've read in Matthew how John was one of the sons of Zebedee, and of course, on other occasions, described as the disciple whom Jesus loved.
So, John clearly, it is John, said to Peter, it is the Lord. And then Peter leaves the boat and rushes to the encounter of Jesus.
[23:43] Now, really what we want to do is just notice and contrast these two disciples, John and Peter. First of all, John. John recognizes that it is Jesus.

And again, the question is left hanging somewhat. How does he recognize that it is Jesus? Is it a case that the boat is drawing closer to the shore, and he looks carefully, and he recognizes just by a physical sighting, as it were, that it is Jesus?
Well, that's possible. But if it was simply that he saw him more carefully, then it rather leaves us wondering, well, why John? It could have been any of the disciples.
If it was simply that he was getting closer and he could see Jesus. Is it not rather that John comes to the conclusion that it is Jesus because of the catch of fish?
He still isn't able to physically see him in such a way as to recognize him, but in the light of what has happened, in the light of this miraculous catch of fish, he is thinking, he says, well, this could only be Jesus.
[24:56] It could only be Jesus who could have given us these instructions. It could only be Jesus who could have produced this miraculous catch of fish. It must be Jesus. John is the pensive one.

John is the one who is working things out. He's thinking about what's going on. Who is this? What's happening here? And he comes to a conclusion, and a quite correct conclusion. It is the Lord.
It must be the Lord. And he shares his conclusion with the others, and very particularly with Peter. But what if Peter, what does he do?
Well, he hasn't recognized that it is the Lord. He hadn't come so quickly to the conclusion that John had come to. But when John informs him, Peter is immediately of the opinion that, yes, indeed, it must be so.
John is right. I agree with John. And what does he do? Well, Peter being Peter, he jumps into the lake and makes his way to the encounter with Jesus.
[25:58] John is the thinking one, and Peter is the acting one. And this is something that isn't news to us. Perhaps we've met them and discovered them to be so on other occasions.

And the point is simply this, that they're different. Is one better than the other? Is John to be more highly commended because he thought about what was going on and came to this correct conclusion that it is the Lord?

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Or is rather Peter to be commended for his industry and his courage and his action of leaving the boat and going to the encounter of Jesus? Is he better than John?
No. Both are useful. Both are necessary. Both are valued by Jesus.
And not just John and Peter, but the other disciples hauling the net. They, too, are fulfilling a job. They, too, are performing a service in the purposes of the Master.
[27:00] And all are valued. All are useful. Different though they are. And we don't need to labor the point as to how that would apply to us as disciples.

We, too, are different. As a congregation, lots of very different people. Different gifts. Different characters. Different ways of operating. Different manners of thinking.
Not that one is better than another. We're different. But together, valued and useful to the risen Lord. But let's continue considering this passage.
And notice another lesson that we can find here concerning how Jesus relates to his disciples. And it is this one. That the risen Lord involves us in his work with a fatherly love.
And I just want to notice a very small point that feel free to consider and come to a conclusion as to whether it is somewhat forcing a point or not.
[27:58] Feel free to conclude that if you wish. But notice in verse 10, Jesus said to them, the disciples who are approaching the shore, he says to them, Bring some of the fish you have just caught.

A fire has already been prepared. Fish has already been prepared. But it would seem there's not sufficient for all the disciples. And so more fish is needed. And so Jesus says to them, Bring some of the fish you have just caught.
Now let's be very clear here. Who was the master fisherman in this episode? Who is the one who can take all the credit for there being fish in that net?
The involvement of Jesus was a miraculous involvement. Miraculous in the knowledge of the shoal of fish. Different theories are given as to how he may have been able to see the fish without supernatural knowledge.
But they seem somewhat forced to me. It seems that there is a miraculous participation of Jesus in knowing where these fish are and directing his disciples to catch them.
[29:06] Even in the protection of the nets. Again, we can't be dogmatic on this. But this comment that is made that even with so many, the net was not torn. Was it simply good luck?

Or was it a divine protection of the nets even in this episode? Well, regardless, what we can say is that the master fisherman, the one responsible for the catching of these fish, is Jesus.
And yet, how does he address the disciples? Bring some of the fish you have just caught. You have done it. Also, yes, I'm the one who showed you where they were. If it weren't for me, there wouldn't be a single fish in that net.
But you had your part. You cast your net on the right side. You have pulled them in. You have been involved. And as a father would involve a small child.
I think we've used this illustration before. When maybe dad has a job to do in the house. And the three-year-old or the four-year-old wants to help. It would actually be easier for dad to do it without the three-year-old's help.
[30:09] But he involves the wee boy. He involves his son to help him. Give me that tool. It would have been quicker to get it himself. You help me with this. You help me with that. Because he loves him.

And he wants to involve him. And he wants him to feel useful. And so, with fatherly love, he involves him in the task to hand. And so, with Jesus, he involves the disciples.
And he indeed commends them for their involvement. Bring some of the fish you have just caught. I wonder if they might have been even slightly embarrassed that he would have recognized their involvement given the manner in which these fish had indeed been caught.
Well, let's not dwell on this. And as I say, feel free to take of that point what you wish and whether you think it's a legitimate conclusion or not.
But then, coming to a close, we notice also that the risen Lord is concerned for all our needs, however seemingly insignificant. There in verse 12, Jesus said to them, Come and have breakfast.
[31:12] We've already noticed that the fire was burning. The disciples, what are the great needs that they have at that moment? Peter and John and the others.

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What are their great needs? Well, they're cold and they're hungry. They are their two obvious, felt, and genuine needs. They're cold and hungry. And what is there waiting for them there on the shore?
There's a fire and there's food. And who has provided? Jesus has provided. He's concerned for that. He doesn't say, come and I'm going to give you a lecture. Come and I'm going to give you a sermon. Come and I'm going to teach you some important doctrine that you haven't learned yet concerning me.
No, they're cold and He gives them a fire. They're hungry and He gives them food. And nothing has changed. The risen Lord is the one who continues to be concerned for your basic needs, however seemingly insignificant they might be.
And the final thing we want to say, and it really ties in with this immediate point that's just been mentioned, but I want to just, what shall we say, draw out one final application from this, and it is this, that the risen Lord prepares and serves breakfast.
[32:28] A very specific thing. Now again, you might say, well, you've just mentioned that. I suppose the point that I'm making is this, that not only does Jesus provide the fish.

You see, that is what He could have done. He could have provided the fish miraculously, as He did, and said, right, I've given you the fish. Now you prepare them. At the very least, you can do that. But He doesn't just provide the fish miraculously. He actually prepares the breakfast. He personally prepares the meal. And we might say, is this not something of an anticlimax?
The miracle of showing them where the fish was, that is worthy of the risen Lord. But preparing a fire and gutting fish? Or to put it another way, what is more remarkable, the miracle or the breakfast?
What do you think? What's more remarkable, the miracle or the breakfast? The risen one, the soon to be exalted to the highest place. A miracle could be almost expected of Him.
[33:33] But the breakfast? Well, this is our risen Lord, our servant, a king. And as we close on this point, we draw things in a sense, or turn things around from being encouraged, as we consider who Jesus is and what the risen Lord is like and how He deals with us.

Let's just close by turning things around on the challenge that that lays before us. What of us? How are we to be disciples of this risen Lord who prepares breakfast for His disciples?
Well, we are to be like Him. Indeed, we can go further. We can say that following His ascension and following His exaltation to the right hand of the Father, we are to be those hands that serve in His name.
He will not be the one who physically prepares breakfast for those who are hungry, but we are to be such in His name. I wonder, is there not also significance in what follows when Jesus reinstates Peter?
And we know that passage, perhaps it's a lot more familiar even than the one that we've just considered. And as He reinstates Peter, as He restores Peter, one of the challenges that He gives to him is this, feed my sheep.
[35:00] And we look at that and we immediately think, well, this is spiritual. And no doubt there is a great truth in saying that there is a spiritual feeding that Peter was to be involved in.

But I wonder, is it not significant that this indication that He gives to Peter, feed my sheep, He gives to Peter, in the immediate aftermath of Jesus having fed Peter and the other disciples with the fish and the bread?
Well, let us then be disciples of Jesus Christ. The servant is not greater than his master. And let us, too, be of those who serve in this humble way as our master has served us.
Let us pray.

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