



## **Is This the Last Time?**

### **John 21:1-19 (NRSV)**

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**Anchor Verse** - <sup>14</sup>*This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.*

**Anchor Theme** - Upon reading this text we realize that Jesus did not just appear, He showed Himself.

### **Background Story**

Let me start with this disclaimer. I know, having been in ministry more than 20 years, that when we embark upon familiar passages of scripture, our memory clicks in and we say to ourselves, "Oh, I've heard this before". And for all intents and purpose, our brains shut off because we have heard it before. I can sometimes even hear the brains clicking off. So, allow me to attempt to reboot your brain by taking a not so obvious path through this text this morning. And the question I am asking this morning, to help us do that is, "is this the last time"?

Since His resurrection, Jesus has been very busy, appearing to Mary, the disciples, Thomas, and now just to seven of the disciples, who are simply trying to go back to some sense of normalcy after all they have experienced. And if we read a little ahead in this chapter to verse 30, we read "*Then Jesus did many other miraculous signs in his disciples' presence, signs that aren't recorded in this scroll.*"

Honestly, these do not sound like the actions of one who has come to the end of His earthly journey. This behavior of Jesus' is not what I typically encounter with someone is ready to retire. The first time I was appointed as an associate of a large church, six months after I started the pastor of 18 years announced his retirement. It took I and the rest of the staff some time to catch on, but what we came to realize is that the moment he announced his retirement, in January, he was retired. He showed up to preach on Sunday, but that was about it. He couldn't even muster the energy to pack up his office and the staff had to do that for him. So, when I see Jesus, in the final days of His earthly presence, being this social butterfly, I start to wonder, is this the last time? For the gospel of John, it is, but is this the last time we get to encounter Jesus.

Clearly there is a reason Jesus desire to connect with others, and it is my belief that if we don't first appreciate the reason then by the time we get to the end of verse 19, in our text for today, we will not have a full appreciation or understanding of two simple words, "Follow Me".

### **Engaging the Text**

Verse 1 of Chapter 21 says, "After these things Jesus **showed** himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he **showed** himself in this way." That word 'showed' in the Greek (phanerōō) means to give proper lighting or to show properly to the point of becoming so apparent it is graspable. Also, it is important to note is that this word 'showed', is actually in a verb tense popular in Greek but in the English language. It is in the Aorist tense. Aorist tense does not have a sense of duration or ending. It's almost like a never-ending loop, and in this text that loop relates to Jesus who "showed' himself in this way. It's like Jesus is starring in His own version of Ground Hog Day, where he just keeps showing himself until he becomes graspable.

Hence, my question, "Is this the last time we see Jesus. Is this the last time?"

What is the significance of making Jesus graspable instead of just letting Jesus appear? Why is it important to understand that His grasp-ability is a continual process that happens over and over again? How does that help us to understand better, what Jesus is really up to in His final days?

I would like to suggest that understanding has to do with purpose, not appearance, but purpose. Jesus appeared with a purpose, so that the disciples would be clear about their purpose. A purpose that would extend into infinity, having no end, in us as disciples. A purpose which becomes abundantly clear by the time we get to the 19th verse and Jesus' interaction with Peter ends simply with the words, "Follow me".

And that's why I titled this sermon, "Is this the last time?" Is this the last time we see Jesus? Of course, we know the answer is no. Because Jesus is showing up in our lives constantly, even when we are too busy or distracted to recognize it.

What Jesus is trying to get Peter and the other disciples to understand is that to follow Him, means Jesus is going to show up continuously in our lives in ways that are graspable. And not just appear, but show up, actively engaged in us and through us in ways we can grasp and recognize that it is indeed Christ in us and not we ourselves. That Christ will show in the midst of our anxiety, stress, fear, helplessness and hopelessness, and help us to grasp hold of peace, hope, faith and love. Jesus will not appear like your uninvited

mother-in-law, but instead will show up and make the knowledge and love of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ graspable.

And if we understand all of that then His final command to Peter and the disciples and to us is simply, "Follow me". What Peter couldn't grasp was that Jesus was not just talking about love in the moment or loving Jesus specifically, but instead Jesus was talking about the Aorist tense kind of love that would be ongoing and never ending, not just love for Him but for all who would ever seek to know him. "Follow me" for Jesus meant me and....

So I ask my question again, is this the last time? Is this the last time that the disciples (all 2000 years of them) will see Jesus? The answer is no, if we are willing to do what Jesus is really asking us to do, to follow Him.

### **Conclusion**

Following Jesus sounds easy but is far from easy to do. I don't see a lot of 'Follow Me' happening in the world. There are pockets or moments, but I don't see the grasp-ability of Jesus evident today. Remember when we used to say WWJD, now I feel more compelled to ask, do we even know what Jesus did, and what is expected of us?

But that's what this season of Easter-tide is all about. Being clear about what it means to follow Jesus and seek to do that in ways that Jesus doesn't just appear, He shows up and becomes graspable. That's why we revisit every year, Lent/Easter/Easter-tide to be reminded of our work as disciples.

My encouragement to us, is that we not get so comfortable with our Christian-ness that we forget our Jesus-ness. That Christ loved us and died for us. Jesus showed us how to love as He loved and makes Himself graspable to anyone who seeks Him.

<sup>14</sup>*This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.*

Is this the last time? I pray not. Amen.