



# The Trinity Pulpit



## Questions and the Resurrection

**John 20: 19-31**

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All I will take is a memory...from the house that built me. That is the final line of the new song by country singer Miranda Lambert. Her haunting song *The House that Built Me* is about returning back to the house where she grew up reminds us of those moments when we seek to come to grips with our past, our present and our future. There is something comforting about going back to a place or a situation where we felt safe and secure. There is something reassuring about returning to familiar surroundings. Lambert's voice rings out:

*I know they say you can't go home again.  
I just had to come back one last time.  
Ma'am I know you don't know me from Adam.  
But these handprints on the front steps are mine.  
And up those stairs, in that little back bedroom  
is where I did my homework and I learned to play guitar.  
And I bet you didn't know under that live oak  
my favorite dog is buried in the yard.*

*You leave home, you move on and you do the best you can.  
I got lost in this whole world and forgot who I am.*

*I thought if I could touch this place or feel it  
this brokenness inside me might start healing.  
Out here it's like I'm someone else,  
I thought that maybe I could find myself.  
If I could walk around I swear I'll leave.  
Won't take nothing but a memory  
from the house that built me.*

I wonder if that is how Peter felt in John 21. Jesus was alive. They had seen him twice now. Twice

they had this unique experience of Jesus coming to them through the locked doors and into the upper room. He had come to reveal his resurrection and also to prepare them for the future. Yet, the future still was unsure. We don't find the disciples running into the streets after Jesus appearance like they do on the day of Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit. They are still just together. We don't know how much time has passed. We do know there has been enough time for the disciples to find their way back to Galilee and familiar places. Had they gone home? Had they seen Jesus, heard his words, received his commission and instead of going out into the world at this moment simply gone home. It seems to be the case. Those that are mentioned are those who are from Galilee. They have gone to familiar places and situations. In this moment, when they are still trying to determine what to do next, Peter announces I am going fishing. The other six other disciples agreed fishing sounded like a good idea and joined Peter. We are told they were in the boat all night, but caught nothing.

Fishing at night was a common scene. It was not uncommon to look out at the sea at night to find fishing boats with lanterns attached. Fishing at night was many times very profitable. Many times the haul was not made in the heat of the day, but rather in the cool of the night. However, this night they had caught nothing. Early in the morning there is a stranger that comes to the shore. John tells us that although it was Jesus, none of the disciples recognized him from the boat. Jesus calls out to the fishermen, "friends haven't you any fish?" The word "friends" is actually an intimate term for children. Sometimes it meant child and other times it meant friend. What is to be sure is that is was an intimate word. The disciples call back to the stranger with one simple word, "no." It is an emphatic response. I think I hear in their response a little frustration with the situation and maybe with the stranger calling out. The stranger

says throw your net on the right side and you will find some. When they did they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

Why these experienced fishermen trusted a stranger on the shore is open to speculation. Some suggest this was a miraculous haul like the one in Luke 5, while others suggest that there was nothing miraculous occurring here but simply a common practice. The boats were not far from the shore in the practice of fishing. It was not odd to have several people in the boat, while one person would be on the shore wading in the water to look for schools of fish. Many times it was from the shore that you could see the fish when they were hard to spot from the boat itself.

At the moment they begin to gather the fish, something happened in the heart of John and Peter. John comes to an astounding conclusion. The stranger on the shore was not just some helpful person who was passing by. When Peter hears John make this statement, Peter stands up in the boat, places his outer robe upon him and instead of helping with the catch and rowing back to the shore, he jumps into the water and begins to make his way toward Jesus. The word for jump is literally fling or throw. It is an urgent act something that is done with out caution. The same man who walked carefully on the water with Jesus in the storm, now throws himself into the water with the hope that John is right. The man on the shore is Jesus.

The other disciples also head to the shore with boat and their haul of fish in tow. When they all arrive at the shore, they find that Jesus has already started cooking breakfast. There were some fish and some bread. Then, Jesus tells them bring some of the fish you have caught and put it on the fire. Come and have some breakfast. Jesus came and took the bread and the fish and gave it to them. It is in this moment that the text says something that is so odd. John writes, "None of the disciples dared ask him, who are you? They knew it was the Lord." This was Jesus' third appearing to the disciples after being raised from the dead.

None of the disciples dared asked "who are you? They knew it was the Lord." Sometimes you just know. Sometimes the Lord speaks and you don't need to ask questions, you just know. We have all had those moments in life. It is a sunrise over the ocean or a sunset on the sound and all of a sudden there is a moment of silence seen, we will never see again and something arouses in our soul, God is with us. We don't have to ask any questions we just know. It is a busy day and the e-mail, texts and calls will not stop. The demands of work and errands to run with the kids have created a list that we wonder how we are going to be able to com-

plete. We find our self at a stoplight and a song or scripture comes to our mind and in that moment, we know. We know that God is with us in the business of life. We are facing the hard news of death, illness or loss, yet we have a peace that surpasses all understanding. Where does that peace come from? We know we just know that it is the Lord and we do not have to ask any questions.

The disciples did not need to ask any questions that day. They knew, they just knew it was Jesus. What I find so interesting about this third appearance of Jesus is not its miraculous nature, but its mundane nature. Gone are the images of empty tombs, Roman Guards, powerful Jewish figures, upper rooms and the festivals of Jerusalem. This story is all about everyday life for these disciples. They are back in a familiar place. They are doing what they use to do everyday. They are surrounded by the same folks they have been with for at least three years, and most of those mentioned in our text knew each other before they met Jesus.

The story is not about everyday activity. It is about everyday moments, everyday people, and everyday events like breakfast. Even the breakfast is uneventful. The haul of the fish is not miraculous like the one in Luke, but just good observation. The breakfast prepared by Jesus that morning is not a miracle like the feeding of five thousand with two fish. If Jesus could feed thousands with two fish and some bread surely he could feed seven fishermen with one fish and some bread but that is not what happens. In fact, Jesus says add some of the fish you caught to the fire and let's have breakfast. Literally there is nothing miraculous described in the story. And yet, in this everyday moment of life they did not have to ask, they knew it was Jesus.

As inspiring as the moments with the risen Lord are with Mary at the empty tomb and with the disciples in the upper room are, this third appearance creates more hope and more possibilities. It reminds us that although there are moments when God breaks through in miraculous ways in our lives, like passing through locked doors and walls, most of the time Jesus shows up in the middle of life and calls to us to join him. How can we experience everyday resurrection?

It seems to me, there are two things we can do to experience the resurrection on a daily basis. The first is to put our self in places where we have experienced Jesus before. Now we have discussed that you cannot live your faith only in the past. We cannot try to move forward by recreating the past. However, there is something we gain by daily putting our self physically and mentally in a familiar place. I find it interesting that the disciples have this everyday experience with Jesus after the resur-

rection in the place where they had first heard Jesus' call. They were in a place where they had met Jesus before.

I think there is great strength for living with Jesus' presence when we daily put our self in a place where we have met Jesus before. This is the role of the disciplines in our lives. When I speak of disciplines I am speaking of the ancient disciplines of our faith. I am speaking of activities like prayer, scripture reading, and meditation on God's word, journaling our experiences with God, as well as outward disciplines such as service and simplicity.

Many of us want to experience God everyday but we do not take the steps to place our self spiritually in the place where we can meet God everyday. The practice of the spiritual disciplines is a way of creating time and space for God in our daily lives. When we spend time in prayer not only requesting, but quietly listening we find that place the hymn writer describes a quiet rest. When we take time to read the Bible daily something spectacular happens, and that is a text that had no meaning at all a year ago all of a sudden becomes a word of direction today, because God is speaking through his written word to our current situation. When we take time to practice the outward disciplines of simplicity, we realize that God has already met our needs. When we practice service to others we get our eyes of ourselves and we see God at work in the lives of others.

In those moments something wonderful happens. In those moments of placing ourselves in familiar places everyday we experience God. We have these moments when we do not have to ask, we just know, God is at work.

For my grandmother, the place was two worn places on the ground next to a well at the back of her farm. There she knelt and prayed daily. For my spiritual formation professor in seminary, it was a chair in his living room. He never set in it except to spend time in prayer. For others it is a quiet path through the woods, or it is a place in their office. For some it is a park bench in a green space near their office. To be sure for some it is the quietness of this sanctuary. For our Lord Jesus it was to remove Himself to solitary places to pray.

Where is your familiar place? Where can you create that place where you can daily go and meet God? As much as we long for those special miraculous moments, what the Christian life is really about is making every moment miraculous by daily choosing to find a place to go and meet with God.

We not only need a familiar place, we need to be looking for God's familiar ways. Although we would not begin to suggest that God can not work in new and wonderful ways, that is the mistake the religious leaders of Jesus day made. We also can learn to recognize God's work in us and around us. The more we spend time with the resurrected Lord, the more we recognize the signs of the resurrection. Look at Peter and John as an example. The first evidence of the resurrection for them is the word of Mary and the empty tomb. Yet, they leave that experience with questions about what had happened. Now after seeing and experiencing Jesus they do not need to ask questions, they just know it is Jesus. They are beginning to recognize the work of the Lord post-resurrection.

What was it that day that brought them to the conclusion it was the Lord? Maybe it was the familiar setting. Maybe it was the haul of the fish, like the one that was part of their first encounter with Jesus. Maybe it was the way he served them, like he had served them in the upper room before crucifixion. Maybe it was the way he looked on the seashore from the boat. This was not the first time they had looked at Jesus from a distance across the waters of the Sea of Galilee. Maybe it was the way he said friends. He had said, "I no longer call you servants but I call you friends" Maybe it was all of these familiar activities of Jesus that caused them to have such certainty that day that the stranger on the shore was Jesus.

It is not only a familiar place that helps us to experience everyday resurrection, but it is learning to notice the familiar ways of God. The more we walk with Christ, the more we begin to notice Christ in our world and in our lives. The everyday moments of life take on new meaning because we are learning to notice God's hand in those moments.

It is as it has been said every bush catches fire and is aglow with God's glory.

Everyday resurrection is the result of putting our self daily in a place spiritually to witness Jesus is alive and to see his work.

Why do we need everyday resurrection? In a sermon at Riverside Church in New York City, William Sloane Coffin once said, "Christ has risen to convert us not from this life to some other life, but from something less than life to the possibility of full life." Let me mention two things that this everyday resurrection story brings to our lives. First, it reminds us that Jesus did not come to his disciples so they could just remember what he had done, but so that they could follow him from this day forward. Jesus did not come for their sympathy, but for

their loyalty. He came to call them to obedience.

There is a story about a high school girl who wanted to go to college but as she was filling out her application her heart sank. The question read “are you a leader?” The girl wanting to be honest answered the question “no” and sent in her application. To her surprise she received the following letter. A study has shown that this year our college will receive over 1,000 new leaders. We are accepting you because we have decided that we need at least one follower.

One follower... that is what Jesus needs. That is why Jesus meets them in this everyday moment. He needs obedient, persistent and devoted followers. That is why he comes to us everyday. Jesus comes to us to remind us that we are not called to just remember a crucified Jesus, but to follow a risen Savior.

Secondly, Jesus comes to us everyday to remind us that failure is not final. Look who is in this crowd. There is Thomas the one who doubted while others told him of Jesus’ resurrection. There are four others who deserted Jesus. There is John who alone went to the cross. Then there is Peter who brashly exclaimed that he would never deny Jesus but of course did, so three times in the pressure of the night Jesus was arrested. The rest of this chapter is the reminder of how Jesus forgave and restored Peter and gave him a new mission. Peter was not going back to fishing for good. Peter had a new mission. Jesus had come to tell him that day that failure is not final.

Everyday Jesus comes to us to remind us that our failures of yesterday end at the beginning of a new day. We do not have to carry our failures into a new day. The great old hymn reminds us “morning by morning new mercies I see.” Our failure does not have to be final. The last word is not what has happened, but what is going to happen with Jesus in the future.

After 9/11 I noticed something significant in American religious culture. There was a desire even a longing to return to the elements of worship that were ancient and had stood the test of time. At funerals and memorials all over the United States the ancient hymns of the church were sung and played. The playing of Amazing Grace or Holy Holy Holy became common place. People came into empty sanctuaries like ours for weeks at time just to sit in the darkness and pray and think. There is something within us that in the moment of crisis we long for the familiar places where we have met God and the familiar ways God has spoken.

That is what this everyday resurrection story is about. It is the reminder that in an everyday situation Jesus is there. Jesus comes to us everyday to call us to follow today. Jesus comes to remind us that our past is our past and today is a new opportunity to walk with Him. Will you let your past be the past and begin a new with Jesus? Will you follow Jesus today? Will you begin to pray, look and listen for Jesus everyday? If you will, you will discover what these disciples discovered, an everyday resurrection. ✦

