Guest Preacher - Rev. Dr. Malcolm Maclean (Retired)

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Preacher: Rev. Malcolm Maclean

[0:00] I would like us to think together about the passage you read there, John 21 verses 1-14 and just see some lessons that we can learn from it.

! John 21 is an epilogue. Each of the Gospel writers have different ways of presenting their material. The Apostle John, he composes his Gospel by first of all giving us a prologue, verses 1-14.
And that is no doubt designed to help the reader appreciate, to some extent, the greatness of Jesus.
And there in that prologue, he takes the reader back into eternity, before Jesus was born. And it points out to us that he was there with God in the beginning.
[1:22] And that by believing, you may have life in his name.

And you'd expect that to be the end of the Gospel. Of course, he's written it so that people would believe. But then he adds this other chapter, chapter 21, and it's a kind of epilogue.
And I think the point of the epilogue is to make readers think about what they've read.
All the details in the Gospel of John, well, how do we recall them to mind? The messages of the Gospel of John.
I mean, what's going to happen to people like Thomas and Peter? Who in the previous chapters have shown themselves to be rather unreliable.
[2:56] What about Nathaniel? Whose name hasn't been mentioned since the first chapter. Anything to say about him?

And we can go on and ask these kinds of questions. Because that's the point of an epilogue. To make people think about what they've read.
And John is fully aware of that. And he uses this chapter to that purpose. He closes the previous chapter with Jesus and the disciples.
down in Jerusalem in the upper room where he has just appeared to Thomas. And now in chapter 21 they've moved away from Jerusalem and they are up in Galilee.
Now, Jesus predicted this, of course, and the angel predicted it earlier in the day of the resurrection. He had said to the women that they were to go and tell the disciples that Jesus was risen and he would go before them into Galilee.
[4:15] And initially when you read that, you would think, well, that's the first thing he's going to do. He's going to go ahead of them up to Galilee. But we know from the account itself that he had other things to do before they went to Galilee.

But the instruction of the angel, and also another reference that Jesus made about this, shows there was something important about going to Galilee.
Something was going to happen there that was to be of great significance. And this significant event in Galilee, we can read about in Matthew chapter 28.
And it's assumed that this great gathering in Galilee was a gathering of all Jesus' disciples.
And it's probably the incident that Paul refers to when he says about the risen Savior in 1 Corinthians 15. He says about him there, they appeared to 500 at once.
[5:20] So there's this big gathering in Galilee that the disciples are going to go to, and something's going to happen there.

And that's where John 21 opens. They're up in Galilee waiting for this meeting. And what do they do while they're waiting?
Jesus does a miracle here, as we read. He enables the disciples to have a miraculous catch of fish.

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And of course, he had done that before. This is not the first time he had given to them a miraculous catch of fish. But this is the last recorded miracle of Jesus.
And there is something touching, at least, that his first miracle was done in Galilee, when he turned the water into wine.
[6:32] And his last miracle was done in Galilee, when he made the disciples here, as they catch the fish, he brought that wonderful miracle to them.

Jesus loved Galilee. Jesus loved Galilee. There are impressions given in different parts of the Gospel that there were places that Jesus liked.
And one of them, of course, is the house in Bethany, where Mary and Martha and Lazarus lived. And Jesus loved being there.
And he was very, very, very, very, very precious to him. And I think that proves the reality of his humanity, that there were places that he just liked to be.
I don't know if you're familiar with the poem that McShane wrote about Galilee. And he says this in it. And I think it's quite interesting.
[7:50] Of course, it's only his opinion, but it's quite an interesting statement that he made. He says this, O Saviour gone to God's right hand.

Yeah, he says, McShane's in Galilee when he writes this. O Saviour gone to God's right hand. Yet this same Saviour still, Graved on thy heart is this lovely strand, And every fragrant hill.
So, that was McShane's opinion. And it's up to yourselves whether you believe it or not. But I think there's something sweet about that.
That the Saviour liked to be in certain places. And presumably, he's been up in Galilee as well. We don't know.
Maybe he's just arrived. But presumably, he's been up there. And he's left Jerusalem. And he's somewhere.
[8:55] And it looks to me that he's somewhere in Galilee. I mean, he knows that in a few weeks' time, he's going to leave this earth forever.

But there were places on the earth, in which he had encounters with his father.
And where he had encounters with those who became his people. And so on. And I think it's useful to just to remind ourselves that Jesus here is engaging in his final acts before he leaves this world. The world that he had come. At least the inhabitants of which he had come to help. Now, this occasion with the disciples going fishing.
Some people think it's a sign that they were getting cold in their spiritual heart.
[10:10] And that somehow they were disappointed. And maybe because the Savior hadn't appeared as he had said he would.

And they returned to their old job. And they were, I mean, the Sea of Galilee was where Peter and Andrew and James and John had worked for decades.
Or at least for a couple of decades. And here they are. And these folk would interpret it this way. Say it's a sign that they were kind of backsliding.
Do you believe that? That having seen the risen Savior, as is described in chapter 20.
And having seen the evidence of his real resurrection. That when they went up to Galilee to meet with him.
[11:22] And he didn't tell them the date. He just said, I'm going to meet you there. Do you really think they would backslide? Well, I suspect they didn't backslide.

And that there was nothing wrong with them going fishing on this occasion. But rather, they probably had to do it.
In the midst of great spiritual events, certain mundane things have to happen.
In the midst of revivals, people still have to eat. And waiting for the Savior to appear in Galilee. The people still had to find food. And it looks to me, that's what they're doing. Peter volunteers to go and get the fish.
[12:33] And the others say they'll go with them. There's no sign that Jesus is going to come this particular day.

Which of course is a dangerous assumption to make. But maybe they were aware that the other disciples hadn't yet joined them.
For this gathering in Galilee. And there's only a few of them mentioned. So where are the rest? Perhaps they're on their way.

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And these particular ones that are mentioned here. Well, they're just going out to get some food. And the astonishing thing is.
That the Jesus whom they expect to come. Comes in an unexpected way. They're waiting for this large gathering.
[13:38] And it's going to happen. And it's going to be a marvelous event. But is Jesus necessarily going to stay away until the big event happens?

Or is he liable to appear unexpectedly? When we are just, as far as we ourselves are, engaged perhaps in something mundane.
But anticipating a time when we hope there's going to be some kind of divine encounter.
Say at a communion time. We expect him to appear at the big aspect of it. But does he appear in the little aspects of it?
Well, here these disciples are just doing something mundane. And all of a sudden, Jesus appears. Of course, it tells us that he wants to be with his people, doesn't it?
[14:54] As I said earlier, he's been up in Galilee, as far as we can tell. And he hasn't spoken to any of them yet. Since he last saw them in Jerusalem.

But where's his heart? And we'll come back to that later on. But anyway, Jesus helps in mundane things.
And that makes life meaningful. What are you planning to do tomorrow? Same old thing as last Monday. But Jesus might turn up.
Not physically, of course. But he might just make his presence known. And transform the situation.
Maybe, like Peter, we are planning to do something that we're good at. Fishing.
[16:02] And suddenly find that whatever it is doesn't work. As Peter discovered. And was reminded. And I think this is the message of it.

He was reminded. That even in these small things of life. He needs Jesus in them. For them to work. So.
Tomorrow. Or any day of the week. We should expect Jesus to appear. And to appear in such a way.
That indicates he is helpful. Always helpful. In the mundane things of life. Now if you were.
To describe. A list of disciples. And you knew what they had been doing. Which ones would you put first?
[17:08] On your list. Would you put the. The ones that had been. Excellent. First. And then kind of.

Work. Down the way. Through. Through. Through. Through. Through. Through. Through. Through. Through.
Through. Through. Through. Through. Through. Through. Through. Through. Through. Through. Through.
Through. Through. Through. Through. Through. Through. Through. Through. how he vehemently denied that he knew Jesus.
And he had been warned about it, and yet he was warned by Jesus about it, and yet he, confident about himself, said to the Savior, I'll never do that.
[18:16] He said to the rest of the disciples, they may do it, but I'll never do that. We know what happened.

He showed as much energy in falling as he had done in following. And that's quite solemn, isn't it?
He didn't just fall in a small way. The energy that he had showed in his enthusiasm for following Jesus, he showed in an opposite way when he denied Jesus.
Maybe that was his personality. Did nothing by half. But anyway, he's mentioned first.
And he's mentioned first before the incident happens later on where Jesus restores him. So John is saying something, isn't he?
[19:30] He's saying something to all readers. You've read about Peter's fall. But I'm putting him first in the list.

And then there's Thomas. And we can read about him in chapter 20. And he could speak with energy as well.
And we know what he did on resurrection day. He actually said something that was very cruel. The disciples, our disciples, for some reason, he's missing from the upper room on that particular day.

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And the other disciples come to him and say, we've seen the Lord. And he basically says, never. Despite all of them saying that they have seen him, he says, you're all wrong.
And unless I thrust, that's the word he uses, unless I thrust my hand into his side, and put my finger in the wounds in his hands, I will not believe.
[20:58] A week later, Jesus appears, reappears to the disciples. And for some reason, Thomas is with them. But Jesus appears.

And looks at them all and sees Thomas there. And he says to Thomas, and he takes Thomas' own words, and says to him, thrust your hand into my side.
And put your fingers on the wounds. And we don't know what the state of Jesus' body was on that particular day. He's not yet glorified, although he's risen from the dead.
And therefore, we have no idea what his wounds were like. There may have been no sign of anything. Or they may still have been obvious.
But the startling feature of it is he takes Thomas' own words. And gives him the opportunity of trying out what he desired.
[22:25] And of course, we know that Thomas then, Thomas didn't do it. Just said, my Lord and my God.

But we could say about Thomas, well, he failed badly. But where does John put him on the list? Second. And there's a lesson there, isn't there? About those who have fallen and repented.
How do we estimate them? Then there's the others in the list.
And as I mentioned earlier, some are not mentioned. The ones that are named, they're all apostles. Well, maybe the other two were not apostles. And the rest of the apostles are not around.
[23:35] But John is saying, there's a way to treat failures that we should remember. And then there's what we could call the complexity of providence.

And they're in the process of obeying Jesus' command to go to Galilee.
And yet, they don't know when it's going to happen. And so they go out fishing. As I suggested, perhaps get food.
And Jesus just appears. Unexpected. Providence is never straightforward.
I mean, Peter, he's going to have an unusual experience this day. If we want to look at the providence in his life, he's going to show great enthusiasm for Jesus when Jesus appears at the seashore, the shore of the Sea of Galilee.
[24:55] And yet, later on, he has to go through some kind, we didn't read it, but from verse 15 onwards, he has to go through some kind of public restoration. resurrection.

It has to be done before this big meeting in Galilee. As all the disciples gather there, they've all got to know that Peter's been restored.
So, it's true that Jesus appeared to Peter on the resurrection day itself, but that's private. Peter has told the disciples about it, but nobody else has seen it.
And these disciples are delighted that the Lord has risen and appeared to Simon, as they put it, to the two traveling back from Emmaus.
But there has to be some kind of public restoration. And we might have imagined that the public restoration should be at the big meeting.
[26:12] The meeting of the 500. But instead, it happens in front of the seven. These seven, the five who are named and the two who are not named, it's in front of them that Peter is restored.

And it's a beautiful restoration, but as Jesus asked him, do you love me more than these? It is the complexity of providence, isn't it?
Life is made up of all kinds of different things. and here's Peter and the others because they didn't expect to see Peter treated in this way either.
But the shepherd, he's going to restore his sheep and do it in a public way and these seven or the six, the other six of them, they're going to be the witnesses.
So, you're finding providence complex? All providence is complex.
[27:33] we don't live in a world where we can specify what's going to happen or why it's happening or things like that.

All we know about it is that God is able to work all things for good to them that love God. and Peter's desire to go fishing on this particular day starts off with a failure.
But all things work together for good to them that love God. so Peter would have found that providence is well, leave it in the hands of Jesus because that's what it is anyway.

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Providence isn't anywhere else but in the hands of Jesus. He's head over all things for the benefit of the body of the church.
Another lesson that we get from this incident is hell Jesus when we've caught nothing. I mean Peter's the fisherman and we're told there that he asked them in verse five, do you have any fish? [29:20] And they answered him, no. We've been out all night, we've caught nothing and they're just quite straight with that detail.

They've been totally unsuccessful and they tell them they haven't caught anything. it doesn't happen to us in exactly the same way, but sometimes in Providence we've done our best as I'm sure Peter did here when he was out fishing and nothing happened.
And we have our assessments of it and Peter might have said well it was the wind or something else happened with the fish who knows.
Didn't try to explain his failure he just admitted it. all of them admitted it.
I mean they had been with Jesus before and they had seen him do miracles in a similar miracle in another occasion when he had used Peter's boat and he got a marvelous catch of fish and they knew that Jesus could do something about it.
[31:02] I think the lesson that comes on this particular detail is that when we done something and we done our best and it seems unsuccessful just admit that to Jesus and it may be when we have done that that we'll then experience the next thing that they experienced that he turned what seemed to be a pointless exercise into a very fruitful one and I suspect the principle here is those who know they're empty are the ones who are likely to get filled for those who try to minimize their emptiness they might not get filled be honest before the

Lord just say to him it didn't work maybe he had some kind of resolve to do something for the Lord and you went ahead and did it and it was a good thing to do and as you look at it nothing's happened tell Jesus and see what he does then and the last thing I want us to think about that comes out from this passage is to remember the details and we see that in the verse where John tells us how many fish there were 153 of them there in verse 11 all kinds of suggestions have been made with the significance of that but I think the real significance is that
John took the time to count them he took note of what had happened other people might have thought that would be enough to know it's just a lot of fish but John wanted to know how many of them there were assuming it was John that counted them but somebody counted them and it's and it's good to put our experiences under a microscope our spiritual experiences what has the Lord done for us in such a circumstance how has he blessed us during it to just to take a detailed note of it it was customary in the past for people to have diaries and in their diaries they wrote down that this happened to me at such and such a place and when
I was reading this verse and God spoke to me through it and this is what he said to me a whole range of I prayed about these things and God answered them and they kept it down they wrote it down because in 20 years time they wouldn't remember it I suppose all of us have regrets in life
One of the regrets I have is that every January 1st I started a diary and I got no further than January 4th we are meant to record what the Lord has done this is an encouragement to look back I mean John wrote this gospel 60 years after the incident happened and yet he remembered the number of fish that were caught we all if we're
Christians God has blessed us numerous times but what can we say about those times well John would say to us take a note to them take a note of them or as somebody else has put it count your blessings name them one by one and it will surprise you what the Lord has done 153 fish it's a good catch it was even better that he actually counted them to see how many there were precision thus taking notice things so these are some of the lessons in John's epilogue the biggest lesson of all is of course he's telling us that the one in the prologue who was
[37:14] God the eternal God who lived with the Father in heaven in chapter 21 he tells us what he's like now that he's also a man it's the same yesterday today and forever he doesn't appear to us in the physical way he appeared to these disciples but he himself said that he was going to send the Holy Spirit the comforter another comforter the one who's just like himself to be with us forever and he can do things in our lives that are similar to the things that we have thought about he can come into the mundaneness of our daily experience and just put his blessing upon it and who can say what he'll do when that happens shall we pray

Lord we give you thanks for the way the Savior works although he's away from us physically now in heaven he's still as involved in our lives as he was on that day he turned up at the sea of Galilee we

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thank you for the reality of his humanity of his willingness to enter into our failures of his willingness to restore us of his willingness to help us to Jesus we pray that we would be honest before him that you would teach us the value of that and that we would realize that he recovers the fallen and strengthens those who serve him so help us Lord to look to Jesus our prophet our priest and our king so remember us we pray for Christ's sake amen we can conclude by singing psalm 133 in the Scottish Psalter psalm 133 it's on page 424 behold how good a thing it is and how becoming well together such as brethren are in unity to dwell we'll sing the whole psalm together Together such as brethren are In unity to dwell
Thy precious heart Went on the head Thou die the fear Till flow In air on sphere Thou die the scars Did all this garments go As there holds you The truth of God On Zion's earth descend
For there the blessed In heart of the land Life that shall never end May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ The love of God the Father And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all Amen Amen Thank you.

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