

Jesus is the greatest encourager

Message for Sunday, June 14, 2020
by Bruce Fraser

I remember how I first got to know Jesus. I had seen him around a few times, heard him preach.¹ But my relationship with him really began early one morning after we had been fishing all night, without getting a thing. We had given up, but Jesus told us to try once more. I still don't know why we bothered, but we did. We ended up catching so many, the net couldn't hold them all!

I knew then that I was in the presence of someone holy, someone far too good for the likes of me. I knelt before him and said, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man."² But Jesus said, "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." I looked at him, and saw that he really meant business.

So I just left the boat and everything to go with him.³ He called my brother Andrew, and my partners, James and John, to go along as well.

For the next several weeks, Jesus takes us all around Galilee. He teaches in the synagogues and on the streets, heals the sick. All the time, we're watching, wondering what it's all about. At night, after the crowds have gone, we talk. Wow, do we ever have lots of questions!

When he talks about God, it sounds so .. so real, like he really knows God. He teaches us how to pray, not memorizing prayers, but just talking to God like our Father.

Then he hits us with the big surprise: He says we've learned enough to go out on our own! He gives us a quick lesson in how to preach and heal, but he says don't worry about details: just pray, and God will give us all the help we need.⁴

And it works! I actually stood up in front of a crowd and talked about how God loves people. Me — Peter! Can you believe that? There were some sick people, so I went a had prayer with them, and they got better, just like that!⁵

After we were together again, we were out in boat one night. Actually, Jesus wasn't there; he said he would join us once we got around the lake. But then out in the middle of the lake, we see him walking towards us. Yeah — walking *on* the water!

We're really scared, thinking it may be a ghost, so in a panic I call out, "Lord, if it is you, tell me come to you on the water." Jesus replied to me, "Come."

Why not? If Jesus can show me how to stand up in front of people, why not walk on water? So I get out of the boat, and I'm doing it! I'm walking towards Jesus — on the water!

All of a sudden, I remember how deep it is out here, and I start to slip. I can just picture my Mom saying, "Now Peter, how many times have I told you to think twice before you jump into something"? I cry out, "O Jesus, save me." He reaches out his hand and grabs me. But he doesn't scold me for not *thinking*. Instead he says, "You have so little faith; why did you doubt?"⁶

Why did I doubt? I've seen with my own eyes what Jesus can do. I'm beginning to think that Jesus is the Messiah, the one God promised to save our people. And I'm with him!

One day Jesus is wondering what people are saying about him. We tell him some of the rumours and gossip we've heard. Then he turns and asks us, "But who do you say I am?" I jump up right away and say, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." There! I got it out.

Then he said the most wonderful things about me anyone ever said: "Blessed are you, Simon son of John. For you did not know this on your own, but my Father in heaven showed you. I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not overcome it."

¹ Matthew 4:13,17

² Luke 5:2-11

³ Matthew 4:18-20

⁴ Matthew 10:5-8

⁵ Luke 10:17

⁶ Matthew 14:22-33

I had this warm feeling spread all over me. I didn't know what he was talking about, but just to hear him say those things about me was wonderful.⁷

After that, he went on talking, but he seemed to be getting depressed. He was telling us that the good times were going to end; that he was going to get into trouble and get hurt; even that people would kill him!

I tried to cheer him up, but then he got mad at me! He looked at me as if I were a devil, and he said I was more a problem than a help. He said I was being selfish, and that I wasn't really committed to obeying God.⁸

Wow! I felt as if he had punched me right in the stomach. I couldn't believe anyone could be so mean, saying things to hurt someone like that. Especially after he had said I was so good.

Yet, when I thought about it later, I had to admit he was right. I really enjoy being around him. Life has never been as exciting and interesting as it is has been lately. Who would ever have thought of Simon Peter preaching, or walking on water?!? And just to be near him, to listen to him talk — I've never felt so close to God before.

He's right. I've been thinking about all the good times—that is, the good times that I've had. Is that what following Jesus is all about? Is it just to have good times? He said I'm not really committed to obeying God. He's right. I need to put God first in my life. That certainly is the way Jesus lives.

Funny thing: that same day, Jesus also talked about what we have to do if we want to be his disciples. He said we have put away our selfishness, take up our cross (I wonder what he meant by that?), and follow him. He wants us to commit our whole lives to him. He said, "Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."⁹

OK! I'm going to do it. I'll do anything, go anywhere, stand up in front of people, and I'll do it all for Jesus. I promise!

I'm glad Jesus and I are still friends. It's only a week since he said those things to me, and now he wants James and John and me to go with him on some sort of retreat up on a mountain. Ever since I made my commitment to follow him, I've been waiting for a chance to show him I really mean it. Maybe this is it.

After we get up there, we are praying, but then something incredible happens to Jesus! He turns all white, even his clothes. He was as bright as the sun, as white as the snow on the hills in the morning. Then two others are with him. I hear them talking; they're Moses and Elijah — talking with Jesus as if they had known one another for years!

I want to stay there forever (I guess that was my old selfishness again), but a cloud comes along so I can't see anything. The next thing, I hear a voice calling to me, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him."

Now you know I had said earlier that I believed Jesus was the Son of God, but this ... to hear God actually say it.... Something happened to Jesus while he was up there; but that's not all. Something happened to me as well. It made me all the more committed to serving Jesus Christ with all my life.¹⁰

Some time later, I had my chance to prove my loyalty to Jesus. We were in the Garden of Gethsemane for our regular nightly prayer. Suddenly a band of armed soldiers came and arrested Jesus! I grabbed a sword, and started swinging. "Run for it, Jesus! I'll hold them off while you get away!" But he told me to put the sword away; that it was God's will for it happen this way.¹¹ If that's God's way, I'm not so sure I'm going to be strong enough to follow through.

As they took Jesus away, I followed from a safe distance. We finally ended up at the high priest's house. I could just imagine what was going on inside. I hid among the crowd outside, but some of them recognized me. They challenged me, and I thought they were going to go for me, too. So I had

⁷ Matthew 16:13-19

⁸ Matthew 16:21-23

⁹ Matthew 16:13-26

¹⁰ Matthew 17:1-8

¹¹ John 18:10-11

to pretend I didn't know Jesus at all.¹² Right then, the rooster crowed.

In that instant I remember our talk after supper just a few hours earlier. Jesus had predicted that I would do this. I was so proud, I boasted that even if all the others left him, I never would; I would die for him.¹³ He saw right through me, from the very start, knew that I was no good.

After Judas realized what evil he had done, he hung himself. I should have done that, too. Which is the worse evil: to hurt someone; or to be quiet and say nothing when I see someone being hurt? I'm just as guilty as Judas. At least he had the integrity to kill himself. I'm too chicken even to do that.

After the dirty business is all over, I go back to our meeting house with the others, but I don't want anyone around me. I just crawled into a corner and sulked.

On Sunday morning, there's a big commotion out in the porch. I overhear one of the women say "He's alive!. And he wants Peter and the other disciples to meet him in Galilee."¹⁴

The other disciples start to ask all sorts of questions of the women. Forget about them — I've got to see for myself! I run as fast as I can to the tomb, and I see his clothes, but no body. Then I begin to remember what Jesus had said about "rising again on the third day."¹⁵

Jesus said he wants to see all the disciples back in Galilee, but that he especially wants to see me. I'm afraid what he's going to say when he sees me. He's probably going to kick me out of the group.

But where else can I go, after I've been with Jesus? There is nowhere else! There is no one else. He's everything to me! Oh God, why does it have to be like this? Why can't I just go back to the beginning, and start all over again? I'd give anything, anything at all, if I could just live these last few years over again. Being with Jesus has changed me, but now I've lost him forever.

A couple of weeks after that, we are back in Galilee waiting for Jesus to come. Some of us had have gone fishing again in the Sea of Galilee where we first met Jesus. It's another rotten trip: we slaved all night, and don't even have enough to cook breakfast.

By morning, we are giving up, but Jesus is suddenly there on the shore, and tells us to try once more. We do, and it's just like the first time: we end up catching so many, the net can't hold them all!

When I realize it really is Jesus, I jump over the side of the boat. This time I don't care how deep it is. Half swimming and wading, I make my way to the shore where he's waiting for me.

First he just looks at me. He looks in my eyes, and I know he understands what I'm going through. He doesn't scold me or anything like that. He just asks me a simple question: "Do you love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Three times he asks me the same question. It hurts that he doesn't believe me — and then I understand. He's giving me a chance for every time I said I didn't know him.

"Yes, Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you!"

Then he looks at me once again, and says again those words which changed my life: "Come and follow me."¹⁶

Peter had promised that he would die for Jesus. Now he has something much more practical to do instead: live for others. Jesus calls us to do the same in our lives.

Have you done wrong things in life? What a silly question! Of course you have. Don't condemn yourself. Jesus doesn't. Instead of that, Jesus wants

¹² Luke 22:54-62

¹³ Matthew 26:31-35

¹⁴ Mark 16:7

¹⁵ John 20:3-8

¹⁶ John 21:15-23

to forgive you, to welcome you back home, to give you a purpose and direction in life.

This is a verse from the hymn “Rescue the Perishing:”

Down in the human heart, crushed by the
Tempter,
Feelings lie buried that grace can restore;
Touched by a loving hand, wakened by
kindness,
Chords that are broken will vibrate once more.

Friends: with Jesus, even the impossible is just a miracle waiting to happen.

Next Steps:

- Have you ever blown it? Promised God that you would be completely devoted... and then failed miserably? Join Peter.
- You can say, “I’m hopeless. Why bother trying?” Or you can say, “Jesus still believes in me. With his help, I can change. With his power at work in me, we can do great things. I have something to live for.”