

# No Rooster This Morning!

May 5, 2019

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## John 21:

[1] After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tibe'ri-as; and he revealed himself in this way.

[2] Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathan'a-el of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zeb'edee, and two others of his disciples were together.

[3] Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat; but that night they caught nothing.

[4] Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.

[5] Jesus said to them, "Children, have you any fish?" They answered him, "No."

[6] He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, for the quantity of fish.

[7] That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his clothes, for he was stripped for work, and sprang into the sea.

[8] But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.

[9] When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish lying on it, and bread.

[10] Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught."

[11] So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and although there were so many, the net was not torn.

[12] Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord.

[13] Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish.

[14] This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

[15] When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs."

[16] A second time he said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep."

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[17] He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep.

[18] Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go."

[19] (This he said to show by what death he was to glorify God.) And after this he said to him, "Follow me."

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This coming June 3, I will have been an ordained Lutheran Pastor for 46 years. Until I was 13 I was convinced I was going to play center field for the New York Yankees. Then one afternoon while playing Babe Ruth League baseball I saw a 15-year-old boy hit a baseball 450 feet, and I realized it was time to reassess my career plans.

About that time, a new pastor at my church, Pastor Dasher, got me interested in the German theologian and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He also got me interested in the theologian and doctor Albert Schweitzer. I started reading books like *The Cost of Discipleship*. And before the year was over, I began to seriously ask whether God was calling me to the ministry. I didn't know it at the time, but in their own way, my grandma and my parents were already in on the conspiracy. The year before Pastor Dasher came was 1959. Eisenhower was in the White House. The Dodgers had moved to Los Angeles. I was 12. It was summer, the week of July 4. I was outside in the field on our small North Carolina farm. I was practicing my swing, hitting rocks with a stick. I had just hit an unbelievable home run when Grandma called.

"Tommy," she said, "I want you to do something for me. Mr. Moffitt is being released from prison this morning. He will be coming down the road in about an hour. I want you to go down to the foot of the hill and wait for him. He will be dressed in white. Tell him he is invited to eat with us and to come on up to the house."

My grandma was a 4'11", snuff-dipping woman who could outwork any two men and often did. She was not the kind of grandma you ignored! I said, "Yes ma'am," and I ran to the bottom of the hill and waited.

Jim Moffitt and his dirt-poor family had been neighbors ever since I could remember. They were what many people then called "white trash." Jim, Edith, and their seven barefoot children had lived in a two-room shack about 300 yards from us until six years before, when one day, something snapped in Jim's

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head during a fight with Edith and he cut her throat with a butcher knife. Edith survived, Jim was sent to prison, and the children were put into foster homes.

My heart was pounding as I waited. I thought, "'Old Man Moffitt'! That jail bird! He's liable to have a knife in his boot!"

In a little while I saw 'Old Man Moffitt' coming down the road. He was dressed in a white shirt and white pants, standard day-of-release dress for prisoners then. When he got within 50 yards of me, I yelled, "Mr. Moffitt! Grandma said you're invited to dinner today!"

I turned and ran up the hill toward our house. Mr. Moffitt followed. When I ran into the house, I was dumbstruck. Mom and Grandma had prepared a meal like I had only seen at Thanksgiving or Christmas. White table cloth. Best china and silverware. Ham and chicken. Every kind of vegetable. Several cakes and pies.

When Mr. Moffitt knocked at the backdoor, Grandma called out, "Hello Jim! Come on in. Welcome back." And she had Old Man Moffitt *sit beside me*.

Mom and Grandma taught me that summer day in 1959 what the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ means. It means doing what the Risen Lord tells us to do by reaching out to feed his sheep, even if they're branded unlovely or undesirable. It means providing hospitality to people, including those in dire straits. We do not have to approve of someone's actions to show them compassion. We must never let fear get in the way of acting compassionately to help someone. We must always give people another chance. We must never so spiritualize the words "feed my sheep" that we ignore the physical, material needs of persons. It was the greatest sermon I ever received.

I share this story with you today because today's Gospel proclaims the same Resurrection Good News to us today. And it extends to us the same call I was extended when Grandma told me to go invite Old Man Moffitt to dinner.

Look with me for a few moments at this Gospel, and tell me if you agree.

The disciples, to whom the Risen Lord has already appeared twice, have gone back to their old routine – fishing. The revolutionary impact of Jesus' defeat of death has not yet affected them. They are willing to settle for the familiar. They go fishing by themselves, thinking they know how to fish. They fish all night, but the net comes up empty.

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So they are desperate. Even though they are professional fishermen, they are willing to follow the suggestion of a perfect stranger who suggests they throw the nets starboard.

When they do as the stranger suggests, they are overwhelmed with a miraculous catch of 153 fish. At the time of Jesus there were 153 known varieties of fish in the Mediterranean world. It is an omen of what they will accomplish shortly in fishing for people of all races and countries.

After they experience the miraculous catch, only one of the disciples, the author of this Gospel, John, recognizes the stranger on the seashore as the Risen Lord. The Lord allows some of us to see sooner than others.

All the disciples work together to haul ashore the miraculous catch. Perhaps they recognize as they do so that they were only able to make the catch with the Risen Lord's help. Perhaps they recognize that it requires them all working together to accomplish the task.

Then, as they reach the shore, Jesus the Risen Lord himself feeds his own herd of riffraff – unsavory, ornery, bullheaded, stubborn, conniving, quarreling, bickering, power-hungry – sheep. Jesus doesn't seem to hold their desertion and denial of Him against them. He is willing to give them all another chance. He has come down the hill himself – it was called Calvary – and waits for them, to invite them to eat. "He is not serving supper this time. That was the last meal of their old life together. This is the first meal of their new life together—a resurrection breakfast, prepared by the only one who knows the recipe."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus doesn't bother them while they are eating. Did you notice that? He lets them eat and enjoy their grilled fish and bread. (Wouldn't you have just loved to have overheard their conversation as they ate?) The Lord's timing is compassionate. When things may not go as we wish when we wish, remember: the Lord's timing is compassionate.

Then, when they had finished breaking their fast, the Risen Lord decides to give Simon Peter another chance. To release Peter from his prison of denial. To proclaim to all, he has done his time, it's time now he is let out.

"Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" Peter had outdone all the other disciples in denying Jesus. Now Peter is being asked to outdo all the other disciples in declaring his love for the Risen Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, [Gospel Medicine](#), Cowley Publications, 1995, p. 87.

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Jesus repeats the question to Peter. Three times he asks him. Peter's heart is pounding. He looks at the charcoal fire and remembers the fire in the courtyard of the high priest. He waits for another rooster to crow.

But there is no rooster this morning! Only the Risen Savior! Offering him another chance.

Simon, son of John, do you love me? Yes, Lord, you know... Feed my lambs. My lambs, Peter. So many children. All colors. All races. They need to learn about me and my love for them. This is not the world I want for them, Peter. Too much hatred. Too much war. It won't feed them, Peter. Change it. Change it for them. Get busy, Peter. Feed them. Show them I love them. Show the world how to feed them.

Proclaim my love in words and deeds. Don't just tell them, Peter. Feed them. Be Bread of Life for them. Feed my lambs.

Simon, son of John, do you love me? Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. Tend my sheep, Peter. They are hungry. They need hope. They need bread. They need guidance and protection. Don't be afraid. I will be with you. They won't always be kind. They won't always listen. Don't force them to eat. Just offer them the Bread of Life. Don't judge them, Peter. Just tend them.

Simon, son of John, do you love me? Peter still waits for the rooster to crow, but there is no rooster! Instead it is the Voice of the Love that will never let him go. Go down to the foot of the hill, Peter, and tell them all they are invited to come and eat. The Meal is ready. There's enough for all. You too, Peter! Come on to the table. Welcome back. It's good to have you home! Yes, Lord, you know ... you know.

Yes, I know. I know, Peter. It's going to be alright. Wipe those tears from your eyes. I need your help. I have sheep to feed. It's not always going to be easy, Peter, and you won't always be in control. But I am with you now and always. Let's go. Follow me.

And that goes for the rest of you too! Let's go. Follow me!

**AMEN**

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