

May 16-20, 2022 Edition

Following

The Year Of Jesus Part 20

Fishing With Jesus: What Is Reconciliation?

By: Ed &/or Judy Gardner

May 14/15, 2022



When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ,0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday: All of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 (NLT)

Reflection: This week's focus is reconciliation. But that's not a topic we really think about much these days. Sometimes you'll hear it when a separated couple gets back together or when you're balancing your checkbook, but what does the Bible mean when it says that reconciliation is now our jobs? Well, I think the story of Jesus fishing with His friends in John 21 is a good picture of it. But before we read the story, I think it might be smart to read about the first time Jesus goes fishing with the disciples:

One day while Jesus was standing beside Lake Galilee, many people were pressing all around him to hear the word of God. Jesus saw two boats at the shore of the lake. The fishermen had left them and were washing their nets. Jesus got into one of the boats, the one that belonged to Simon, and asked him to push off a little from the land. Then Jesus sat down and continued to teach the people from the boat. When Jesus had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Take the boat into deep water, and put your nets in the water to catch some fish." Simon answered, "Master, we worked hard all night trying to catch fish, and we caught nothing. But you say to put the nets in the water, so I will." When the fishermen did as Jesus told them, they caught so many fish that the nets began to break. They called to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They came and filled both boats so full that they were almost sinking. When Simon Peter saw what had happened, he bowed down before Jesus and said, "Go away from me, Lord. I am a sinful man!" He and the other fishermen were amazed at the many fish they caught, as were 10 James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid. From now on you will fish for people." When the men brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed Jesus. Luke 5:1-11 (NLT)

Ok... so that's what happens at the start of Jesus' ministry. And for the next 3 1/2 years Jesus would spend every day teaching those disciples what fishing for people looks like. It all comes down (IMHO) to the three signs that defined every interaction Jesus ever had:

Everybody's Welcome ~ Nobody's Perfect ~ Anything's Possible

The disciples just didn't get it. They were constantly messing it up. I mean, think about it for a minute. The number one lesson Jesus tried to teach them over and over again was humility, and yet the number one argument that the disciples had over and over again was who would be the greatest in Jesus' Kingdom; One time when a town asked Jesus to leave, James & John asked Jesus if He wanted them to call down fire from Heaven on that town (as if they could?) and Jesus said, "NO"!; When a bunch of children wanted to come see Jesus they tried to keep them away and Jesus said, "stop it, let them come to me."; When Jesus wanted them to stay, they ran; When He wanted them to stay awake they went to sleep; When He wanted to sleep in the boat while they crossed the sea of Galilee they woke Him up because they thought that the boat was going down; When someone was casting out demons in the Name of Jesus who wasn't one of the 12 they asked if they should tell him to stop, Jesus said, "no.";

Thomas was a doubter; Judas was a thief; Levi was a tax collector; Peter cut a guys ear off. It's like, where did He get these guys? Disciples R Us?

But He never gives up on them. And as it turns out, they eventually got it. They eventually understood what this message of reconciliation was and how to carry it into the world the way Jesus would. We'll focus on that this week, but for today spend a few minutes looking at this snapshot of reconciliation in John 21 and we'll break it down in coming days.

Later, Jesus showed himself to his followers again-this time at Lake Galilee. This is how he showed himself: Some of the followers were together: Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the two sons of Zebedee, and two other followers. Simon Peter said, "I am going out to fish." The others said, "We will go with you." So they went out and got into the boat. They fished that night but caught nothing. Early the next morning Jesus stood on the shore, but the followers did not know it was Jesus. Then he said to them, "Friends, did you catch any fish?" They answered, "No." He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they did, and they caught so many fish they could not pull the net back into the boat. The follower whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Peter heard him say this, he wrapped his coat around himself. (Peter had taken his clothes off.) Then he jumped into the water. The other followers went to shore in the boat, dragging the net full of fish. They were not very far from shore, only about a hundred yards. When the followers stepped out of the boat and onto the shore, they saw a fire of hot coals. There were fish on the fire, and there was bread. Then Jesus said, "Bring some of the fish you just caught." Simon Peter went into the boat and pulled the net to the shore. It was full of big fish, one hundred fifty-three in all, but even though there were so many, the net did not tear. Jesus said to them, "Come and eat." None of the followers dared ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, along with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus showed himself to his followers after he was raised from the dead. When they finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." A third time he said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" Peter said, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you!" He said to him, "Feed my sheep. I tell you the truth, when you were younger, you tied your own belt and went where you wanted. But when you are old, you will put out your hands and someone else will tie you and take you where you don't want to go." (Jesus said this to show how Peter would die to give glory to God.) Then Jesus said to Peter, "Follow me!" Peter turned and saw that the follower Jesus loved was walking behind them. (This was the follower who had leaned against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who will turn against you?") When Peter saw him behind them, he asked Jesus, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus answered, "If I want him to live until I come back, that is not your business. You follow me." John 21:1-22 (NCV)

Wow. Jesus is letting Peter back in. Talk about practicing what you preach, huh? And aren't you glad that that's what reconciliation means? That with Jesus the door is always opened? That we're never too far gone. More on reconciliation as we go through the rest of this week.

Tuesday: Several of the disciples were there-Simon Peter, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples. John 21:3 (NLT)

For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us... Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death. Ephesians 2:14-16 (NLT)

Reflection: Reconciliation again... it keeps popping up over and over in the New Testament. Turns out it was the reason Jesus came to this earth. To reconcile us to God and then to reconcile us to each other. Why did we need to be reconciled to each other you ask? Because sin divides us. It always has.

All the way back in the Garden of Eden is when it started. Right after Adam & Eve at the forbidden fruit what happened? First they were ashamed- for the first time ever shame entered the world. Before that they were allowed to eat whatever they wanted, they were naked and unashamed. Who wouldn't pay for a gig like that? Right? But they messed it up. And what happened next? They were separated from God. They had to hide in the bushes (as though a couple of bushes would hide them from the creator of the universe ;o) because they were now ashamed. And when God called them on it what does Adam say?

It was the woman You gave me...

With one fell swoop Adam begins the time honored tradition of passing the buck... and He passes it twice with one fell swoop. He blames Eve, sure, but he also blames God. And so we see all the way back in Genesis chapter 3 that sin separated people from God and it also separated people from one another (it also separated us from ourselves but we don't have time to get into that whole can of worms today ;o).

So we need to be reconciled. And that's what Jesus does. He brings about reconciliation between us and God and between all human beings. But we don't know that we've been reconciled. In fact, because of sin we will stay separated unless we learn how to be reconciled to one another. It's one of the main things Jesus teaches His followers during His 3 1/2 years on earth. It's what His followers will spend the rest of their lives practicing with one another.

Reconciliation. And you see it already at work here in the boat while they're fishing in John chapter 21. Think about it. You've got Nathanael, Thomas, James and John, Peter and two other mystery disciples. There is no way these guys would be hanging out with one another except that they are practicing what Jesus taught them. Think about it. Nathanael finds it easy to believe. In fact the first time he meets Jesus he believes almost immediately because Jesus tells him something:

Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the man that Moses wrote about in the law, and the prophets also wrote about him. He is Jesus, the son of Joseph, from Nazareth." But Nathanael said to Philip, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Philip answered, "Come and see." As Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said, "Here is truly an Israelite. There is nothing false in him." Nathanael asked, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you when you were under the fig tree, before Philip told you about me." Then Nathanael said to Jesus, "Teacher, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." Jesus said to Nathanael, "Do you believe simply because I told you I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than that." John 1:45-50 (NCV)

Nathanael was what some might call, "superstitious". He believed almost too easily. Then you have Thomas in the boat. Doubting Thomas. He was the opposite of Nathanael. He found it difficult to believe. In fact when the other disciples told Thomas that Jesus was alive he said he would only believe if he could touch the wounds in Jesus' hands and side. When Jesus shows up Thomas believes but Jesus says to him, "You believe because you see me. Those who believe without seeing me will be truly blessed." These guys are complete opposites. And yet Jesus works with both of them and here they are in the boat together. Why? Ordinarily these kinds of people judge one another. They criticize and condemn one another.

Nathanaels will believe anything! They don't use logic... they just blindly accept whatever they're told! They make me weep for future generations! Thomases won't believe anything! They're arrogant, stuck up know-it-alls who think they're better than everyone else! Nothing is sacred to them. It's sort of like the way red state Americans feel towards blue state Americans (and vice versa).

And yet here they are in the boat together. Why?

Reconciliation.

There was something more important to them than their differences. They had been given a mission. To carry Jesus' message of reconciliation into the world. And it all starts at home (or in this case in the boat). They have to do the hard work of getting along with each other if anyone else is ever going to listen to their message.

But they do it. And because of that the message of Jesus continues. It's still continuing to this very day because in every generation there have been men and women who were willing to carry the message of reconciliation into the world. And how did they do that? The same way Thomas and Nathanael did. Starting at home (or work or school or church or...). So how about you? You have been given this message of reconciliation too. Will you carry it into the world so generations of folks who are coming will get to hear about Jesus' message as well?

Wednesday: You are members of God's very own family... and you belong in God's household with every other Christian. Ephesians 2:19 (TLB)

Just as there are many parts to our bodies, so it is with Christ's body. We are all parts of it, and it takes every one of us to make it complete, for we each have different work to do. So we belong to each other, and each needs all the others. Romans 12:4-5 (TLB)

I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the one true Church, the fellowship of believers, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

Reflection: Ever wondered why the message of reconciliation is SO important to Jesus? Probably because we have a tough time getting along and that messes up Jesus' plan as it turns out.

If you believe the pollsters, something like 80% of all Americans believe in God. They don't believe in the church but they believe in God. In fact, not only do they not believe in the church... the overwhelming majority can't stand the church. And yet part of the Apostles Creed (it was tucked in there towards the end) is as follows:

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the one true Church, the fellowship of believers...

But that's usually where most people get off the bus. Why? Because of our differences? Maybe. But what I've noticed is, when there is fellowship in spite of differences, something truly amazing happens. And the people who claim to believe in God but can't stand His church are attracted like moths to a flame.

It was that way 2,000 years ago. When the church first began they were forced together out of necessity. They were persecuted so they had to stick together. This is what Luke says in the book of Acts about those first days:

The believers met together in the Temple every day. They ate together in their homes, happy to share their food with joyful hearts. They praised God and were liked by all the people. Every day the Lord added those who were being saved to the group of believers.
Acts 2:56-47 (NLT)

In spite of their differences they gathered together. And the effect was intoxicating.

Ever wonder if God could replicate that dynamic in our day? Ever wonder what it would take for a group of people to honor God so deeply and love each other so irrationally and serve the world so passionately that the world would take notice the way they did 2,000 years ago? Yeah, me too. I'm still wondering how we get there. Don't get me wrong... I believe what we are doing at Riverside is miraculous. I really do. But let's face it, we're not at the level of Acts chapter 2. Maybe it's just not possible in today's culture to reach that level, but wouldn't that be cool? I guess it would take a miracle. A work of God. Something that is WAY beyond the leaders at Riverside.

But then again, what we are currently doing at Riverside is WAY beyond our capabilities. We shouldn't be able to do what we're doing. Plain and simple. We are functioning FAR beyond our administrative and organizational skill sets. And yet here we are. How did that happen?

About 17 years ago Judy dragged me to a conference. It was a Franklin/Covey organizational conference. It was called, What Matters Most. Now I know what you're thinking... Ed went to an organizational conference?!?! Well did it do him any good? Did he get his money back since they obviously had finally met their match?

No, I didn't get my money back. But I got something better. A vision. At the half way point of the day, right before lunch the leader passed out 3X5 cards and asked us to write out what we do with our lives is money and skill weren't an issue.

At the time I was working at a church that was divided up into camps. You had the conservatives, the progressives, the old fogies who couldn't stand the youth (they make a mess) and it was mutual. It was a tense place sometimes. So when asked what I would do if money and skill wasn't an issue I wrote something like this:

I would be part of a church community where everyone was loved, forgiven and accepted for who they were. Where the young and old, the nerdy and the cool, the rich and the poor, are accepted for who they are where they are no matter their race.

I turned in my card as I went to lunch and forgot all about it. After lunch the leader took out the cards and started reading them aloud. This was a business seminar, not a church growth conference. I wanted to crawl into a whole when he started reading mine out loud. I didn't know what the reaction of these business people would be.

Do you know what it was? A couple of gasps and a few others shaking their heads and one person said out loud, "wouldn't that be cool?"

But the unspoken belief seemed to be, "but that kind of place is impossible... but if it was possible, I'd go to a church like that."

A few years later Judy was going through some old files and found that paperwork. As she looked it over she gasped and asked me, "do you remember that card you filled out at that Covey seminar about what you'd do if money and skill wasn't an issue? You got it! God gave it to you!"

I thought about it for a minute and said, "yeah, I guess He did, didn't he?" And the next words out of Judy's mouth?

"I hate you!"

Now she doesn't really hate me, I'm the light of her life and she wouldn't know what to do without me (but nobody needs to tell her I said that, ok?). But she couldn't believe that I'd actually achieved what I wrote down. Or did I? Technically I'd say, no. I didn't achieve it, God did. With a little help from me and a lot of help from people who came to Riverside (or were already there) and wanted to honor God so deeply and love, accept and forgive each other so irrationally that something truly miraculous occurred. Riverside Community Church. A place like no other that I've ever seen. The way we do church isn't the only way to do church, it isn't even the best way to do church, it's just the way we feel like God has asked us to do church.

But we shouldn't be able to do what we're doing. So what if we chose to believe that those of us, right here in Eagle River, Alaska could take this experiment further? What if we asked

God to create a place here in Eagle River that is reminiscent of the setting of Acts chapter 2? What might that look like? I don't know. How might we get there? I don't know that either. But God knows. Let's just follow Him while we continue to carry His message of reconciliation to a world that needs it more than they even know.

Sorry this was so long ;o)

Thursday:

Why do you fight and argue with each other? Isn't it because you are full of selfish desires that fight to control your body? James 4:1 (CEV)

When they finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." A third time he said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" Peter said, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you!" He said to him, "Feed my sheep. John 21:15-17 (NCV)

Reflection: What makes reconciliation so tough? Well, there are probably a lot of answers to that question but a big part of it can be traced right to my own heart. Did you read the scripture from James for today? Did you see what it said? It turns out that most conflict with others is a direct result of the conflict I am having internally with myself.

In fact, to the extent that I deal with and come to grips with the conflict within me, I will no longer be so bothered by others that I can't help but attack them. And so Jesus is very up front with us about just how messed up we are. He doesn't try to sugar coat it. Sin is destructive. And sin is inside of me. So therefore... well you can probably figure it out. Jesus brings us face to face with our own sin so that we can deal with it (together with Jesus) and move forward.

That's what's happening here with Peter. Do you remember the last night of Jesus' life? He told His disciples at the Last Supper that they would all desert Him. Most of them asked Him if they would abandon Him... sort of like most of His disciples saw this weakness inside of them but hoped they would stand up when push came to shove. None of them did except for John (but that's a story for another time).

But Peter didn't ask if he would be one of them. In fact, Peter stated outright that while all those other losers might abandon Jesus (alright, I'm paraphrasing here a little but that's basically what he said, go check it out), he would never leave. Peter claimed he would die before he'd abandon the Lord. And Jesus looks at Peter and tells him, "Peter, before dawn you will deny that you know me 3 times."

And by dawn on the next morning, as Peter stood around a fire he denied Jesus for the third time. And Peter was filled with shame and guilt and regret.

Now Jesus is alive and Peter is with Him, eating breakfast. The tension had to be so thick you could cut it with a knife. And it's almost the same setting that Peter was in when he denied

Jesus. It's early morning, they're sitting around a fire. And Jesus asks Peter a very important question: Peter, do you love me?

Not once, not twice, but three times in a row Jesus gives Peter the chance to reaffirm his love for Him. Don't think for a minute that this moment was lost on the disciples or on Peter. They knew exactly what Jesus was doing.

He was forgiving Peter publicly. He was reinstating him to the team. And Peter rose to the occasion. This time Jesus tells Peter that the day would come when Peter would die for Jesus. Are you willing to do that for me, Peter? And when Peter assures Jesus that he is willing Jesus says, "then follow me."

And Peter does. When I look at this story it almost seems like Jesus is twisting the knife a little bit when He asks Peter 3 times if he loves Him. And I guess to a certain extent He is twisting the knife, but it's not the torturer's knife He's twisting, it's the surgeon's knife. Jesus is cutting out a cancer that is in Peter that if left alone will eat Peter alive.

He will do the same with you. He will bring you face to face with your flaws, your weaknesses and your failures so that after you've plunged them into His grace you will find reconciliation something that is possible after all. It's not easy, but it is the mission you and I have been given. So let's ask Jesus to open our eyes to the things that are inside of us that are causing all the strife and division with others. Let's let Him cut that stuff out of us, plunge it into His grace and follow Him, just like Peter did.

Friday:

We are made right in God's sight when we trust in Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we all can be saved in this same way, no matter who we are or what we have done.
Romans 3:22 (NLT)

Jesus answered, "If I want him to live until I come back, that is not your business. You follow me." John 21:22 (NCV)

Reflection: Reconciliation is made possible when we trust Jesus and His judgment of us and others.

Do we most need reassurance that we are worthy of Jesus' love, acceptance and forgiveness or that others are worthy of Jesus' love, acceptance and forgiveness?

It probably depends on the individual and sometimes it depends on what day of the week it is and how we are feeling on that day. Sometimes the way Satan gets in the way of my mission of reconciliation is by stirring up my guilt. Reminding me of all the past failures, reminding me of my current weaknesses. Who am I to carry this message of reconciliation to anyone?

Other times Satan attacks my mission by trying to convince me that others are unworthy of this message. Who are they? Look what they've done. Why do they deserve to be unconditionally love, accepted and forgiven?

Because they are dearly loved children of God. Just like I am. And no matter how messy my life may look to me right now, or how messy someone else's life looks to me I'm reminded, we are all on equal footing before the cross of Jesus.

The Bible says that all of us have sinned, all of us have fallen short of God's glorious standard, and all of us need to be made right with God. It says that there is not one righteous person in all the earth. The cross was God's way of being able to accept us without lowering His standards. That's what Jesus did for me.

It's also what Jesus did for you. All of us are saved the same way. It's like when coaches tell their players that the other team puts their pants on one leg at a time. They're no different than you are. You're the same as they are.

And I am. And you are.

And yet, God will use you if you'll let Him. Your story will be different than mine. In fact, your story will be unique in all of human history. He has a plan for your life that if you follow Him you will one day be able to see. But we can't get too caught up in comparing our plans with anyone else's.

Peter started down that road. When Jesus told him how he was going to die, Peter turned around and pointed to John and asked Jesus, what about him? I love what Jesus said:

Jesus answered, "If I want him to live until I come back, that is not your business. You follow me." John 21:22 (NCV)

In other words, live your own story and let Me and John figure out his story.

Great advice, right? And yet I so often forget it. I so often want to compare my story with others. Is my story better? Is it worse? More important? Every time I start going down that road I hear very clearly Jesus saying, "what I do with someone else is not your business. You follow me."

Ok Lord, I'm trying. How about you? Are you following Jesus' plan for your life? Let's walk together as we try to individually figure out what His plan is for each one of us. That's the message of reconciliation in a nutshell.