

John 21:1-19
“Ready for a One-on-One?”
The Rev. Dr. Jean Halligan Vandergrift
Roslindale Congregational Church, UCC, Roslindale, MA
Third Sunday of Easter, May 1, 2022

The Reading: John 21:1-19

“After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. ² Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. 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 after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” They answered him, “No.” ⁶ He said to them, “Cast the net to 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 because there were so many 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 some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped 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, only about a hundred yards off.

⁹ When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish 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 fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, “Who are you?” because they knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time that Jesus appeared 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.” Jesus 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.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt 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 Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.” ¹⁹ (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, “Follow me.”

I think I first heard the phrase “one-on-ones” in a church. The evangelism group used it for an intentional conversation that a church member might initiate with a friend or prospective attender. This particular kind of one-on-one was designed so that the parties could share stories about each other’s lives and what each of them most valued – a natural way of conducting a meaningful conversation about faith.

This evangelism practice borrowed the concept of “one-on-ones” from the realm of community organizing. Through simple conversation, community organizers learn what issues are most important to citizens, eventually empowering residents to engage politically.

“One-on-ones” are also part of the lexicon of the business world – a practice in managing teams, drawing out the best in an employee. In busy families, also, one parent and one child may opt for some one-on-one time, and it’s basketball championship season; you’ve probably heard commentators espouse the advantages of either a zone or one-on-one defense!

In today’s scripture passage we get to overhear a *spiritual one-on-one* between Simon Peter and the risen Jesus. All of them have shared breakfast around the campfire, and then Jesus beckons Peter for a private conversation.

So much had happened between these two men, and the thing still *standing between* Peter and Jesus was Peter’s remorse, guilt, and shame. I imagine that at first he could barely look Jesus in the eye, but when he did, he saw love and grace there. **Peter was ready, and their one-on-one turned out to be a new beginning for him!**

You and I are not left out of this blessing. **When we are ready, we can come to Jesus for some one-on-one time.** Whether we are in trouble or things are going smoothly, when we pray, or as we journal, or in conversation with other Christians, we can experience this kind of heart-to-heart with Christ.

As it did with Peter, *our spiritual one-on-one* will first take us down a path of self-reflection and assessment.

Jesus asked Peter three times: “Do you love me?” I don’t know if Peter had been one who avoided using the “L” word. He may also have been used to saying it lightly, without much thought to its implications, or with no action attached. “Luv ya!” But he was surprised that Jesus asked. “You know I love you!” During this one-on-one, though, Jesus pressed him to wrestle with what *he* actually meant and what it meant to love *Jesus*. Self-reflection and assessment.

A spiritual one-on-one will next take us into a new and better future, one that makes us more alive in Christ than we were before.

It is clear that Simon Peter was already a charismatic individual. The ten others continued following him from one place to another, even after his denial and failure. Peter said: “Let’s go to Galilee;” they went. Peter said, “I’m going fishing;” they responded, “We’ll go with you.”

Jesus drew out Peter’s innate gifts further. He forgave his weakness, blessed his change, and officially commissioned him as a shepherd. It’s as if he said, “Peter, you weren’t thinking how it would affect the other disciples when you denied knowing me, but now I want you to step up. Feed, tend, and feed. I want you to look out for more than yourself. Consider the well-being of my flock.”

It's like when you and I are given more responsibility in our jobs, an organization, or our family. It requires an additional layer of time and care; you have to think of dynamics to which you were previously oblivious!

But when you and I do a spiritual one-on-one with the Resurrected Christ, he not only invites us into service, he equips us for it. Plus, this kind of service has its own joy and reward.

I've recently consulted with a congregation that is 150 years old. Their building has been in the center of town almost the same length of time. All those years, they would have said that they knew and loved Jonesboro. But this congregation did the exercise of one-on-ones with community leaders outside of the church, and it revealed the need for mentors within the juvenile court system from the community.

It was as if Jesus was saying to them: "Do you love me? Really?" The church leaders realized that it was not enough to say they loved youth *at a distance*; Christ was calling them to love and mentor those at-risk, and they are starting to follow.

RCC, you're ready too, to follow in the Direction of loving Christ and your neighbors!