

How the Risen Savior Comes to His Own

JOHN 21:1-14

BY PASTOR JIM LINCOLN ON MARCH 30, 2008

After the resurrection, Jesus came to His disciples over a period of forty days, loving them, teaching them, and enjoying them. He corrected all kinds of thinking errors about His death that had filled their minds and weakened their hearts. He healed Mary's deep sorrow over His death. He resolved Thomas' real doubts. He healed Peter's overwhelming guilt and put him back on track again.

This morning I want to tie together some additional observations about Jesus' resurrection appearances. From them, we can learn how the risen Jesus comes to us as well. We've been focusing on how Jesus satisfied the personal needs of Mary, Thomas and Peter. This morning I want to open the lens wider and look at some ways the risen Jesus came to them as a group. And I've picked out three ways He did that for us this morning.

First, the risen Jesus came to them ***in Community***.

Second, He came to them ***in all His Sufficiency***

Third, He came to ***be with them (Intimacy)***.

COMMUNITY

First, not only did Jesus come to them as individuals, meeting their individual needs, He also came to them as a fellowship or family of believers. The gospel created a community/family of faith. In 1996 Hillary Clinton wrote a very popular book entitled, *It Takes a Village to Raise a Child*. The comedian, Tim Wilson, wrote a song entitled, *It Takes a Village to Raise a Nut*. Sen. Bob Doyle gave a speech entitled, *It Takes a Family to Raise a Child*. Let me add one. *It Takes a Family of Faith to Raise a Village*. And that family is the family of God or the community of the risen Savior.

Verse two says, "Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathaniel, the sons of Zebedee and two other disciples were all *together*." Notice the full stop or period at the end of the sentence. That is so because it's a full statement on its own. There is no stated specific reason or purpose for them to be together other than being together. It simply says that they *were together*. Outside of the one appearance to Mary, every time Jesus appears to them they were to some degree or another together. Even Mary, both when she saw the tomb was empty and after she saw Jesus, immediately ran to the other disciples to share what she had seen and heard. Both, before and after the resurrection something compelled them to be with each other. To say, "See you next Sunday." Just wouldn't do. Their lives were too much bound up in their common experience and faith in Jesus.

Even though Thomas, with all his doubts left the group, within a day or two he was back with them. When Peter returned to his fishing job the others said, "Hey, can we come along?" There seems to be no great reason except that they were compelled to be together.

Instead of saying, "Let's do lunch sometime." Or "We really must get together sometime." they stood with each other. Their lives had been woven together by the grace of God. In all of their vacillating, confusion, foul-ups and progress, the gospel kept drawing them together. They had a Living center. They all shared the reality of a risen Savior. And they found themselves compelled to be with each other.

And that communion wasn't easy. It was a dangerous thing for them to be together. Their Master had been executed for sedition. It would have been much easier to split up. Their lives, like ours, pulled them in a thousand different directions with many demands and responsibilities. It wasn't easy for the others to deal with Thomas who basically accused them of making up a story. It wasn't easy for the women when the men accused them of having over active imaginations. It wasn't easy dealing with Peter who only had two speeds, hysteria and lethargy with nothing in between. It wasn't easy to say, "I'm going to leave all my responsibilities and the demands of my life to go fishing with Peter." Yet, they knew Jesus and they knew that He had risen from the dead. And the magnitude of that reality forged their lives together. They couldn't be alone. Here's the deal...

The experience of Jesus Christ creates community and the experience of community then leads us back to Jesus.

So, before the church was ever an institution¹, it was a circle fellowship of disciples whose souls were knitted together by a common relationship with the risen Lord Jesus. Beloved, doing church as theater, as successful as it will be, will never get at this. Doing church as a concert and a motivational speaker where you take notes and then run off into the sunset of your private religious experience will leave you missing Jesus as He is. Maybe this is why 80% of the churches in America are under a hundred in attendance. Is God ordering things to preserve real community?² The gospel compelled the disciples to be with each other.

¹ The church is an institutional reality and that by the calling of Jesus Christ. However, at the heart of that institution is a deep personal communion with the Lord Jesus and His disciples.

² Of course this doesn't mean that because a church is small it necessarily has community. Small churches can abandon that calling as well as large ones. However, it's more difficult to have anonymity, accountability, and remain private in a small fellowship than in a large one. And that invasion of one's privacy can be exposing and threatening. It's the difference between living in a small town and a big city. Smaller churches force people into accountable relationships. And that can be the opportunity for success as a community of faith as well as for failure. It reveals people's capacity for community much easier than in a large fellowship. Capacities for covenant love, forgiveness, forbearance, endurance, sacrifice, weathering disappointment, and putting up with weaker members of the body are all seriously tested in a small fellowship. For many it proves just too much. Church as

If you're going to be together in covenant community with other believers you will have to pay a price. The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ compelled these early believers to be together, walk with each other, share each others' lives, sacrifice for each other, bear with each other, forgive each other and support each other all because of the Gospel and for no other reason. The risen Jesus creates community not theater.

DIVERSITY

Notice that the list also describes their diversity. Mary, Thomas, Peter, John and Nathanael were all very different people. They had different personalities and orientations. Jesus deals with Mary differently than John. In the depth of her emotional grief Mary is absolutely unaffected by the evidence of the resurrection. She was so driven to see and take care of Jesus' body that she missed all the evidence of the resurrection! There it was, right in front of her, the undisturbed embalming cocoon. When the text says that the head wrapping was folded, the word means "rolled up." It describes the hollow and rolled up embalming strips that were wrapped around Jesus' head and body when he was embalmed. Those strips of cloth and resin were still wound up like a chrysalis or cocoon after the butterfly flies away.

In grade school art class we blew up balloons and then wrapped them with paper mache. After they dried we'd pop the balloons with pins. Even though they were hollow on the inside, the outside retained their shape. This is what Mary saw: an undisturbed embalming cocoon.

theater is much easier on its members. Those doing church as theater, can enjoy commercial success and know very little of this. So, it's not as much a pressing issue. As long as the theater is good, consumers will come. Commercialism, consumerism and competition can create church growth, but they can also steal the soul of the church. My favorite analogy is the comparison between the World Wide Wrestling Federation and college wrestling. The WWF is a huge commercial success with Pay Per View TV, fans, converts, excitement, and multimillion dollar contracts. Here's the problem. *It has nothing to do with the noble sport of wrestling.* By contrast, the local high school and college wrestling programs are dedicated to integrity and authenticity of their sport. However, in a day of artificial fog machines, giant Roman candles, ear bursting noise, and giant flat video screens, they can't compete. They can't scare up more than a few diehard supporters. If they turn to wrestling as theater, they will jeopardize or compromise the integrity of their sport. Size is not the determining factor for genuine community. A large group may enjoy community. It will just be more difficult. A smaller fellowship has a better opportunity to become a community of faith *if* it values this calling enough to suffer for its success.

Also, that fact eliminated three non-supernatural explanations for what she was seeing. Jesus didn't escape by tearing the strips away. They were undisturbed. The guards couldn't have taken it. They would have torn the strips off to get his body or taken the whole thing. The disciples didn't take the body. How could anyone get his body out without disturbing the mummy like embalming encasing? It just wasn't possible. But Mary missed this. She looked in and saw that Jesus wasn't there and immediately concluded that somebody took his body. All she saw was that the body was gone. So Jesus shows Mary His resurrected body before any of that evidence made any sense to her. For Mary, a personal encounter with the risen Jesus was necessary before any other evidence would make sense.

John is very different. John 20:8 says that John entered the tomb saw and believed. He doesn't yet know this is a fulfillment of Scripture but it says that he believed. The word translated "saw" is the Greek word *oida*. It means to theorize or to see with the mind's eye. John saw the undisturbed embalming cocoon came up with a theory. Based on the evidence he was persuaded Jesus had risen.

Temperamentally, Mary needs an experience; John needs some rational evidence. Their experience with Jesus is really different. Thomas needs even more empirical evidence. To Mary Jesus says, *"Look, you don't want to hold on to Me like this. You're going to want to hold on to Me by faith when I ascend to the Father and your Father."* To Thomas He says, *"Thomas, look, feel, touch my hands and side."* When John recognizes Jesus on the shore he stays put and tells Peter. When Peter hears that, he does a cannonball in the water and swims to shore.

The disciples are all very different with different personalities and temperaments and Jesus deals with them each one accordingly. Here's the deal. ***They come to know the majesty of Jesus only as they see Him through the lives of each other.*** You will not know Jesus unless you know Christians and you won't know Christians unless you know Jesus.

In *The Four Loves*, C.S. Lewis writes, *"In each of my friends there is a something only some other friend can fully bring out. By myself I'm not large enough to call the whole person into activity... This communion exhibits a glorious resemblance to heaven itself where the very multitude of heaven increases the fruition each has of God... for every soul seeing him in her own way, communicates that unique vision to all the rest. In heaven each soul has a unique vision of God and communicates that to all the rest. That is why the Seraphim of Isaiah's heavenly vision are crying. "Holy. Holy. Holy." to one another (Isa.6:3). The more we share the heavenly bread between us the more [Bread] we shall all have."*

Thomas will never know a side of Jesus that only Mary could call out, unless he knows Mary. You and I wouldn't know that part of Jesus without reading her story. Many of us aren't like Mary at all. Some, like Thomas, need more evidence. Also, Mary won't know a side of Jesus unless she knows John and is with John or Thomas. Knowing Jesus brings us to Christians we would otherwise have never known. And knowing Christians brings us to know Jesus in ways we would have never known otherwise. *The experience of Jesus leads us to community and the experience of community leads us back to Christ.*

Look, some are theological and some are activists. Activists just love to get out there and get things done. They see connections between Christ and culture and they follow politics, education, and social trends. For others, it's like pulling teeth to get them to have any

interests in these things. Their lives are overwhelmed just taking care of kids, the car, the trash, the repairs, church, and their aging parents. Some are charismatic while others are reserved in their orientation. Some are nurturing. Some are task oriented. Some are relationship oriented. Some are readers and some are planners. Some can fix cars, electrical circuits, lay building foundations. Some grow flowers and some can't. They all reflect something about Jesus. But in our narcissistic way we think everyone should be like us. And so we make the case for our own orientation and then we try to get everyone around us to be like us. Beloved, there are at least four fundamental personalities. That means that 75% of the people you meet aren't going to be like you and don't see life through the same emotional lens that you do! Look, you're not like me and I am not like you. But listen. You may need to be a little bit more like me. And I may need to be a little bit more like you. Can you see how this works? You can't get this through lectures, concerts, TV, radio, or reading. You can only get it through serious fellowship of those who know the Lord and through paying attention to them and forbearing, forgiving, loving and hanging out with them. You're not going to know the multi-dimensional glory of Jesus unless you see him in others. Remember, hell is relentless and endless autobiography. As Dante depicted, hell will leave you isolated and frozen. So, find some believers and work at this.

SUFFICIENCY

Second, Jesus came to them in the power of His sufficiency. In His resurrection appearances, Jesus proved that He was sufficient for their every insufficiency. He relieved Mary's grief by calling her name with his tender grace and mercy. When He called her name on Easter Sunday He proved that sufficiency. He proved His sufficiency to Thomas when He stood there in front of him and said, "*Touch my hands and side. Thomas, put your fingers in the nail holes. I have paid the price for your peace.*" He proved He was sufficient to calm the disciples' fear when He passed through those locked doors with ease. Jesus was so sufficient no locked doors could keep Him from loving them to the end. He proved His sufficiency to Peter when He ordained him back into ministry after he denied him three times. His grace proved more sufficient than his failure. He proved that He would never let Peter go. When the disciple's couldn't catch any fish, Jesus knew exactly where the fish were and directed them to put their nets down right at that spot. They caught more fish than they could lift into the boat. He fed them all from one fish and one loaf of bread, demonstrating that all of creation is subject to his command and power. He proved that He was sufficient for their every need.

Jesus came after them to ensure they knew He was alive, loving them, forgiving them, enabling them, supporting them, feeding them, protecting them, teaching them, keeping them, healing them. He stayed with them for forty days and proved His sufficiency for them.

Here's what this means to us. Paul captured it when he said, "If Jesus didn't rise from the dead you might as well, eat and drink for tomorrow we die." Jesus demonstrated His sufficiency for you and your life when He rose from the dead. If He didn't, then He was just another man who couldn't make good on the promises of He made.

For those who don't believe in the resurrection of the dead there is deep uncertainty and despair. If death is the inevitable future, then worldly satisfactions are all there is to live for: so eat and drink for tomorrow we die. That's why there weren't any atheists around after the killings at West Virginia University or after 911. There is no consolation in the phrase, "Eat and drink for tomorrow we die." Some will hear such words with initial excitement. They offer no accountability, no judgment, and freedom from all restraints. Others hear them and try to live courageously and well in the face of the dark emptiness of life that offers nothing more than what we make for ourselves. And this would all be reasonable if Jesus had not risen from the dead. But He did rise! There is no good reason for anyone to doubt or reject the fact of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But for many... it's simply an *inconvenient truth*. If the resurrection is true, it will cost too much. It means that you must fall down and worship Jesus as Lord or be lost in your sins and hell forever. And the audacity and implications of that claim is why it is rejected.

Jesus' sufficiency in His resurrection changes things. It means that the powers of mercy, and forgiveness have proved stronger than the powers of sin, judgment and death.

My friend John Bronson wrote, "If every dream ends in death, if every light finally is extinguished into an eternal night, if every song ends in unbroken silence of a forgotten tomb, the heart and mind are then driven to find whatever pleasure they can in the moment, silencing the dread of emptiness with preoccupations and distractions." This is how many people live.

But Jesus did rise from the dead and that changes everything, Paul wrote, "O death where is thy sting where is thy victory?" Isaiah said that it was, "...the will of the Lord to crush Him. The Lord put him to grief when his soul makes an offering for sin, but He shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days. The will of the Lord will prosper in His hand. Out of anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied. By his knowledge shall the Righteous One, My Servant, make many to be accounted as righteous."

The Lord Jesus has done this. We can now do as Paul said, "to be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord because now we know our work is not in vain." Because of the resurrection and the sufficiency of Jesus, we know that life does not stop and the end of our physical existence in this life. Life points beyond the grave to when we will be with all the saints in heaven, gathered around the throne of Jesus Christ. "Sing O barren one, who did not bear, break forth into singing and cry aloud you who have not been in labor...The children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married says the lord." Isa.54:1-3

Are you singing these days? Do you anticipate that your children by the womb or by the word will possess the nations and people the desolate cities? Are you living preparing to rule and reign with the twelve tribes of Israel with God's wisdom and righteousness? Knowing Jesus is sufficient for these things, are we investing in the advance of the faith, expanding the kingdom? Or are we drifting, taking up space, or even drowning in a rising tide of selfish satisfactions as the reality of the promises of God and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead fade from our minds and whither away in our hearts? Have our desires out-paced our increasing wealth and made us reluctant to invest in greater kingdom things?

We need to hear again that Jesus is sufficient for everything we need. We can be free and generous with our time, love, resources, suffering, and wealth to advance His kingdom. Do you know that He is sufficient and that He has proven his sufficiency for your every need? You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. He is able.

FINALLY, THE RESURRECTED JESUS CAME TO THEM TO BE WITH THEM.

Jesus said to them, “Hey, let’s see what you’ve got there... 153 fish! That’s Great! Now come and have breakfast. Let’s eat together.” (v.12) Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them and the fish likewise. They shared a meal together. No, Roman candles, no eardrum breaking noise, no crowds, no artificial fog machines and giant flat screen TVs. Just Jesus cooking up a meal for His friends, enjoying and taking great delight in them. Like God did with his struggling servant Elijah and just like Stan Anderson did for us on Easter morning, Jesus made breakfast for his friends. He wanted his friends to rest in Him and His love for him. When Jesus first called them, we’re told that he called them to be *with* Him and then to be sent out to preach. Being *with* Him, that was first.

They have no gospel to spread and no hope to preach if they don’t learn to enjoy the presence of the Lord. They need to know the joy of His presence, grace, peace, and love for them. Beloved, so do we. The climax is not the catch of 153 fish. The climax is this sweet fellowship. Isn’t that what’s really behind all the labor we put into relationships anyway? Isn’t it to please and be pleased by those we love?

When Jesus died it created a season of great testing and fear for His disciples. Yet, Jesus came to them **in community**. He came to them in **His sufficiency**. He came to them **to be with them**.

In your trials how long does it take you to figure out that the goal of the trial is to get you to find your rest in Him? Are you resting in Jesus?

Jesus I am resting, resting
In the joy of what Thou art.
I am finding out the greatness
Of Thy loving heart.

Thou hast bid me gaze upon Thee
And Thy beauty fills my soul.
For by thy transforming power
Thou hast made me whole.

Trust in Jesus today! No one can ever love you like Him.