

36. John 21:1-17

Getting started

Try and get some pictures of the Galilee region today, particularly in Springtime. It is beautiful.



[Photo taken by Mark Wormell on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, at dawn, in April 2014.]

Observation

1. Where did this happen? *[The Sea of Tiberius is another name for the Sea of Galilee. The disciples are back in their home country.]*
2. Who appears to be leading the disciples? *[Peter.]*
3. Peter was naked or next to naked. Why might he put on an 'outer garment' to go swimming? *[He may have got away with nakedness on a boat, but not on shore. In other words, he was complying with standards of propriety.]*

Interpretation

1. Why might the disciples have gone back to Galilee after seeing Jesus in Jerusalem? Does this suggest they had given up their commission to spread the gospel? *[Views differ. There was no church infrastructure and they needed to eat. There is nothing that suggests they had given up on Jesus.]*
2. What is the significance of John mentioning they went fishing at night? *[The symbolic movement from emptiness in darkness to abundance when Jesus, the light of the world, comes in the morning. Good things happen when Jesus is about.]*
3. Why might the disciples not recognise Jesus? *[Poor light and perhaps also that they had last seen him 150 kms away in Jerusalem.]*
4. What suggests that Peter and Jesus were already reconciled by this time, even though Peter had betrayed Jesus three times? *[Peter's excitement that Jesus was there and his impetuous swim to shore.]*
5. What do you think lies behind Jesus helping them catch fish? *[Jesus does not prove he is a knowledgeable fisherman. Rather, we should read this as a miracle, or sign, and also as God's gracious abundance]*
6. What is the significance of the burning fire? *[It links back to Peter's betrayal when he was warming himself by a fire.]*
7. Why mention the number of fish? *[To show abundance. Many have tried to read some deep theological or biblical significance into the number, but none is convincing.]*

Implications

1. What do you like about this story?
2. Do you find it encouraging that when Jesus comes back he has a fish barbecue with his mates, rather than seeking justice against the Jewish leaders and Roman authorities that gave him a false trial and tortured and killed him? What does this teach us about Jesus and his ways?

3. What else do we learn from this story? *[Many things. For example, there is further evidence of the physicality of Jesus' resurrected body. He was still friends with his disciples. Good things happen when we follow his instructions. The sighting of the resurrected Jesus in Jerusalem cannot be put down to the emotional responses of the disciples to the crucifixion.]*

Prayer suggestions

1. Thanks for the further evidence of the resurrection.
2. Ask for us to follow Jesus' advice in all things.
3. Ask that the whole world fall in love with a God who enjoys a fish barbecue with his mates.

Note:

In these Bible studies we have not spent much time talking about the structure of John's gospel. It appears here that there are two endings, one ending at 20:30, and then chapter 21. Chapter 21 has been called an epilogue. Some have suggested that chapter 21 is written by someone else. There are good reasons to doubt this. For example, the loose end of Jesus' relationship with Peter is resolved in chapter 21. Jesus' leadership after the resurrection is confirmed. The role of the church is set out (see the next study). There is no textual evidence that chapter 21 was added later, and did not form part of the original.