



at the table

MEALS THAT TRANSFORM LIVES

## NECESSARY CONVERSATIONS

**Sunday 24 April 2022**

*SERMON TRANSCRIPT*

Here we have another meal that transformed a life - only this was not at a table, but breakfast on the beach. I especially love this passage: I love the way that Peter feels like going fishing and his mates go with him... I love that Thomas, James and John the sons of Zebedee, Nathaniel and others were a community... I love how they don't catch anything (I can really relate to that)... I love the in-joke of not catching fish and Jesus telling them to put their net on the other side of the boat - as if that makes any sense at all - and how they then catch 153 fish... I love that weird detail, the crackling fire on the beach, that there are already loaves and fish there... I love how it is like a beautiful encore to the first-time Jesus met Peter, James and John, and they had a boat busting catch - Peter was invited to follow Jesus and become a fisher of men and, again, he is being invited to follow.

I've preached on this passage a few times. In the past I've highlighted Peter's guilty conscience - his return to fishing was possibly more an indication of his sense of disqualification after denying Jesus 3 times. It's hard to not go there when the publisher of my Bible insert a title that says, "Jesus Reinstates Peter," which sounds like he had been fired. But I don't know... His response of jumping out of the boat and swimming to Jesus makes me think that even though he knew he stuffed up, he no less loved his Mate, his Master, his Messiah. They eat together and then there is what I call a necessary conversation. Nine-five percent of people avoid hard conversations and I fear it's getting worse: we avoid confrontation like we avoid telemarketers and dental appointments. Why talk when you can text? In fact, why text when you can just send an emoji? Or not at all?

What stands out for me is that true friends speak truthfully to each other. I wonder if Simon-Peter was hoping Jesus would just forget about it... You know, "Jesus knows that Peter really

does love him, He knows that his actions of denial were not a good representation of his love...Let's forget about it and move on... Maybe Jesus will not bring it up?" I think we all do this with Jesus and with each other: "Just forget about it." But have you noticed that people who say that seem to remember it at just the right time down the track? Because there is a big difference between keeping the peace and making peace. I want to confess I am good at "just forgetting it" and moving on. But truth be known: I don't always move on.

Well, Jesus doesn't just forget about it. It's not because Jesus doesn't know how Peter feels. It's not that He wants to rub his nose in it, make him feel guilty about the denials. It's not that Jesus needs reassuring that Peter is His BFF. I think Jesus knows that, if this goes unspoken and unaddressed, it'll have consequences. How so? I think this post-breakfast conversation was so necessary for three reasons:

### **Healing** - *do you love me?*

Jesus calls him by his name, Simon son of John, asking, "do you love me" three times. Notice Jesus doesn't cross examine Peter about his denial - there is no guilt or shame implied - but He doesn't ignore it either. He just goes straight to the heart of the matter. We read Peter is offended by Jesus asking three times; but you know, sometimes God has to offend our minds to get to our hearts. "You know I love you!" says Peter. Jesus is trying to clarify and maybe also verbalise, "what's in your heart, Peter? Really, down a few layers. There is power in speaking it out..."

I imagine for the rest of his life Peter would remember that, even though he said three times "I don't know the man," he also sat with his friend in an uncomfortable conversation where he three times said, "I love you." And I suspect this hard conversation would have both offended him and healed his guilt. Jesus doesn't need us to serve Him out of guilt but out of love. You know, we all betray Jesus in our own secret ways. Maybe it's being afraid to talk about Jesus with work colleagues, or chasing the same stuff that the wider culture worships. Maybe it's needing to be in control. Maybe it's refusing to trust Him with stuff like your money. We can all worship Him on Sunday and deny Him on Monday, so I think He is asking us all the same basic question: "do you love Me?"

### **Prioritising** - *more than these?*

But it's not only, "do you love me," but, "more than these?" The second thing this conversation brings out are the priorities of Peter's life. What are the "more than these"? The other disciples? Or the fish? I'm leaning toward the massive pile of sand crusted fish flapping and gasping for air on the beach... But regardless, Jesus' question to Peter is not only a question of love but the prioritising of his loves. What do you love more?

That is a core question of all our lives as we all wrestle with the inner mix of our desires or

loves. Our prevailing culture says, "follow your desires because your most authentic self is found in what you desire." But as John Mark Comer says in his latest brilliant book 'Live No Lies': not all desires are equal. Some desires lead to life; some look good but lead to slavery. He points out St Augustine taught that we live more from desire than rationality. We do lots of things that aren't rational but our desire overrides common sense. You know you shouldn't eat the whole packet of Tim Tams, but something takes over, you crave one more, then another, you know you'd have to run a marathon to burn them off but hey what's one more... Until, oops, empty! Augustine said that the basic problem of the human condition is not having loves or desires, but the disordering of those desires or loves. It's about loving the right things in the wrong order.

To paraphrase Comer, if you functionally love your job more than your kids that's a disordered desire that will deform how you relate to both. If you functionally love being fit and healthy, or love your home, or your me-time, or your football team more than you love Jesus and those things which cultivate that love of Jesus - then your disordered desires will produce distorted outcomes. We do not need to squash desire but discipline them by curbing some and cultivating others so that we don't make the wrong thing functionally what we worship! It's true we do put desires over rationality, but we are all so great at rationalising our desires to justify them.

I think Peter was going to need to know what really were the priorities of his life. Was anything going to get his heart more than Jesus? If it was then I don't know if we would have the Peter we ended up with. I wonder if he would stand firm when, as Jesus indicates, a time will come when he will face the greatest priority call; standing firm for Jesus when he was no longer in control, when his life would be taken from him because of Jesus. When do we most need to know what our priorities are? When we are most under pressure. And I think we are under all sorts of pressures today: pressure to give our kids a particular education and to be in multiple activities, pressure to own a house, pressure to climb the career ladder, pressure to blend into the values of secular society or our friendship group rather than be a radical alternative to it. The more I prioritise Jesus first, the more those pressures lose their potency and, better still, the more those around me find the gospel to be good news.

### **Calling and Vocation** - *feed my lambs, take care of my sheep*

But lastly, this was such a necessary conversation for Peter because it did indeed reaffirm his calling to a vocation of apostolic and pastoral leadership. To love Jesus is to hear His calling and to follow Him in an other-centred life, a selfless life like Jesus lived. Next week I want to break this one down further to talk about the general and specific callings and contexts of our lives, but specifically for Peter this would look like: *Feed my lambs, take care of my sheep*. Peter was getting reinstated to both a general call and a specific calling of apostolic, pastoral leadership, and teaching of a new movement of people

following the way of Jesus. I could add, his context was to the first fledgling churches in an otherwise hostile social context.

I'll go into more depth here next week, but what I'm personally discovering as I get older is that the more I am clear about the contexts I'm called to, the vocation I'm called to, and the underlying calling to follow Jesus in all of life, the more easily I can say "yes" or "no". A personal example of this for me is that, for decades, I've imagined having a little country escape: nothing too grand, a modest house with a view of rolling green hills and bush, lots of space to plant trees and vegetables, a log fire and mobile timber mill, and a giant workshop away from all the responsibilities of leadership and life... But you know, the truth is, it's not my calling, it's not my context, and it's not my vocation. To pursue that would mean I would have to compromise what I am called to. It would distract me from what Jesus asked me to do which, as you will note with Peter, is almost always NOT about yourself or building bigger barns or having some postcard lifestyle or thinking you can indulge two lives at once. The way of Jesus is not very Instagrammable. It's a "via dolorosa" - a way of the cross, as Peter would experience in his own martyrdom. It's not your best life now - it's seeking first His Kingdom.

Soren Kierkegaard wrote in the early 1800's, "Take any words in the New Testament and forget everything except pledging yourself to act accordingly. My God, you will say, if I do that my whole life will be ruined. How would I ever get on in the world?" I wonder do I love Jesus enough to let Him ruin my perfectly reasonable plans for my life? The early church was a radical, counter cultural movement in Greco-Roman society on so many levels because they were ruined by the gospel and its implications for their lives.

I think this was the most necessary conversation Peter was to have with Jesus. It brought deep healing, clarity on priorities, and clarity on what he was specifically called to do. And that trifacta is what most of us need too. To look deeply into:

- places of our woundedness and confronting our betrayals and failures...
- places of our idolatry and disordered loves...
- finding clarity on our calling and the context in which we pour out our lives...

This was an honest conversation; and I suspect what is so critical to personal renewal and transformation in our own lives is simply being prepared to be honest with Jesus, ourselves, and others. Who have you let your guard down for? Who do you let in? Do you allow others to let you in? Necessary conversations happen with Jesus, but they mostly happen with Jesus via Jesus' people.