

My title is “International Spiritual Development Officer.” My work with Mercy Ships is to promote the spiritual development of our crew and volunteers. The word “development” implies a process. “Business development” is the work of cultivating relationships over time to increase the profitability of your business. In the old days you had to take a roll of film to the drug store to get your photos “developed.” Like so many other things today, you don’t have to wait anymore, photos are instantaneous. Who wants to wait? The other day, thanks to Costco, I made breakfast in two minutes – 1 minute for my egg bites, 1 minute for my pre-cooked bacon and I had bacon and eggs. You can microwave breakfast, but you can’t microwave maturity. It is a process. It is that process I want to examine as we consider the last three chapters of John.

We know the purpose of this gospel is different from the other three. In fact, the purpose statement is in our section this morning. At the end of chapter 20, John says he wrote these things “so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”

I am going to make a bold assumption this morning. I am going to assume that most of us here are believers. By that I mean at some point in your past, you accepted the fact that Jesus is who He claimed to be. But there is more to the relationship than simply believing. If believing were the goal of life, then, once you believe, God would just “beam you up.” But our relationship with Jesus does not end with believing. It begins with believing. The object of life is intimacy with God. After his remarkable conversion, Paul expressed his heart’s desire this way,

“I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” *Philippians 3:8, 10-11*

The final three chapters of John’s gospel, depict three experiences that are essential in developing an intimate relationship with Jesus. An intimate relationship with Jesus is developed by...

- Enduring the pain of the crucifixion. (Ch. 19)
- Experiencing the power of the resurrection. (Ch. 20)
- Enjoying the freedom of a restored purpose. (Ch. 21)

I. The sting of death...ch. 19. Crucifixion is a gruesome business...19:1-3. Jesus was beaten and tortured for the sport of it. But on top of that, consider the internal suffering Jesus endured. He was betrayed by a close friend. He was abandoned by His followers. 19:25-27 says, "But standing by the cross (were His loyal followers who would not abandon their close friend in His time of need. NO!) were His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' From that hour the disciple took her into his own household." They all cut and ran.

Jesus was 1 for 12 in the loyal friend category. Besides his mom and some female disciples, only John remained. The betrayal from a close friend. The loneliness and grief when no one comes to your defense. The mocking of those who twist the truth like the vines that made up the crown of thorns. The final indignity was in response to Jesus' prophetic words, "I thirst." Verse 29 reads, "A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth." In the first century, a sponge was used as toilet paper for the rich. The mocking cruelty of the Roman soldiers is on full display. "So you think you are a king? Well, here is your sponge big shot." They soaked it in sour wine, put it on a branch and stuck it in his mouth. Then...He died. He had to, and so must we. The only people who are resurrected are dead ones! That is why, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." Bonhoeffer. "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me."

But no one signs up for this. No one wants to die. Military recruiting posters...shopping, horseback riding, college education, and you know what else? You could die! When we leave that part out, we don't get followers, we get fans.

David Platt says it well, "Suddenly contemporary Christianity sales pitches don't seem adequate anymore. Ask Jesus to come into your heart. Invite Jesus into your life. Pray this prayer, sign this card, walk down this aisle and accept Jesus as your personal Savior...We have taken the infinitely glorious Son of God, who endured the infinitely terrible wrath of God who now reigns as the infinitely worthy Lord of all, and we have reduced Him to a poor, puny savior who is just begging us to accept Him. Accept Him? Do we really think Jesus needs our acceptance? Don't we need Him?"

Oh, that I may know Him and the fellowship of His suffering.

II. The power of the resurrection...ch. 20. Most commentators will tell you that there are 7 signs or miracles presented by John to prove the deity of Christ. John admits these 7 are just a sampling from the life of Christ,³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” Progressively, these signs are moving on a course to magnify Christ’s resurrection, the *telos* to which all the signs point.

Chapter 20 focuses on an 8th sign and the most important one in my opinion – the resurrection. “Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to their homes.” 20:8-9

But Mary stayed. Mary wasn’t ready to say goodbye. When she realizes that Jesus has risen from the dead, she reaches out to touch Him. But Jesus says, “Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.’ ”¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.” 20:17-18

Mary wants to embrace Jesus not only because she is so relieved that He is alive but she may be thinking, “Now things can be like they used to be.” The power of the resurrection is more powerful than your past. Armed with His resurrection power, we can move on from the past and embrace our new reality as ambassadors for Christ. That means I can resign as a political pundit. I can resign as a culture warrior. I can even resign as a victim in an unjust world. I am a new creature with a new perspective and a new purpose in life. But I have to let go of the past. Better yet, I must die to my past in order to embrace a new future. That is not just true of us as individuals, but it is true of us as a church.

Hear me Fellowship. If our memories of the past are stronger than our vision for the future, the end is near. Stop clinging to Bill, Gary, Kurt. Cling to Jesus and boldly proclaim, “I have seen the Lord.”

III. The freedom of a restored purpose...ch. 21. Now that we know the fellowship of His suffering and the power of His resurrection, we are ready to get busy for Jesus right? Not quite. Our future service is threatened by our past regrets. Have you ever offended someone and just hoped they would ignore it? Have you ever

hurt someone and hoped they would just forget about it, just sweep it under the rug? Peter betrayed Jesus. The evening of the resurrection, Jesus showed up to the frightened disciples in a locked room...20:19. It was a miraculous moment, but things didn't get sorted out between Peter and Jesus that night. There had been no slap on the back, no fist bump, no indication that things were ok. Confused and unsure of what was to happen next Peter said, "I'm going fishing." (21:3). When most guys say that, they are saying, "I need a break. I need to clear my head and get away from work for a while." But not Peter. He was a fisherman. He was saying, "I'm going back to work." I'm going back to what I know.

In chapter 21 we read that Jesus appeared to the disciples...21:4-7. After a nice fish breakfast, Jesus asks Peter 3 questions, issues 3 commands and ends where He began with Peter. 21:15-17. And Peter is set free from his past regrets. He is free to follow. How about you? Have you been set free from your past?

Remember the duck...

The conclusion of John's gospel provides a wonderful conclusion to this sermon. The last words of Jesus to Peter are identical to the first words Jesus said to Peter. Mt. 4 records His first invitation, ¹⁸ While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him." Now Jesus repeats the command in John 21:19, "Follow Me."

Of course, Peter being Peter has to provide one more awkward moment. He looks at John and says to Jesus, "What about that guy?" To which Jesus replies, "Follow Me."

Will you follow Him?

- when you suffer the sting of betrayal and injustice and mockery and abandonment?
- when you have to let go of your past to move forward into the future?
- when you are haunted by regrets from your past?