

WHEN JESUS DROPS IN JOHN 21:1-14

After these things, Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and in this way, He showed Himself: Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together.

Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing."

They said to him, "We are going with you also."

They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing. But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Then Jesus said to them, 'Children, have you any food?'

They answered Him, "No." And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish.

Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he had removed it) and plunged into the sea.

But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far from land, but about two hundred cubits), dragging the net with fish. Then, as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. Jesus

said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have just caught."

Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not broken.

Jesus said to them, 'Come and eat breakfast.'

Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, "Who are You?" - knowing that it was the Lord.

Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish. This is now the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead.

For a period of time in 2009-2010, a man named Paul Yarrow created quite a stir among the London news media. Yarrow, usually wearing a beige sweater, kept popping up in the background of live news reports.

Sixteen times this happened to be exact. Paul kept photo-bombing various *on-location field reports*.

At first, Paul's identity was a mystery. He soon got the nickname "the news raider." No one knew his motive. He kept appearing on Sky News, the BBC, Channel 4.

Eventually, Paul identified himself and his mission. His appearances were to protest the "cutie culture" that exists in television news. In Paul's view, it isn't fair that all the TV spokespeople are slim, trim, and good-looking. He says there should be room for folks like him. And for a short period of time, Paul kept popping in, making unplanned appearances to prove His point!

This is exactly what Jesus did after His resurrection.

For a short stint of time - 40 days to be exact - Jesus kept popping in - photobombing the disciples (*you could say*). And these unplanned appearances made a point... **that we should always make room for Jesus!**

The man who rose from the dead that first Easter AM is still alive, and Jesus wants to be part of your life!

Acts 1:3 says of Jesus, **"To (His apostles) He presented himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days."**

Jesus' sudden and surprising appearances vaporized any skepticism in the minds of His followers.

Acts calls these occurrences **"infallible proofs."**

They saw Him walk - heard Him talk - saw His scars. There was no denying it - Jesus was alive! These divine drop-ins filled His disciples with faith and utterly convinced them that life with Jesus would continue!

And here in John 21, the Lord drops in once more!

John begins in verse 1, **"After these things Jesus showed himself again..."** Then he adds, **"and in this way, He showed himself..."** *This is intriguing language.*

It's as if John is going to use this particular episode as a grid for understanding all of His post-resurrection appearances. The risen Christ followed a pattern.

John is saying, here's how Jesus *comes and goes*, how He works *here and there* - how He does *this and that* - why He'll appear *at any time and in any place*.

In Matthew 28:20, just before Jesus ascended into heaven, He informed His disciples, "And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

There is a sense in which Jesus is always with us.

In the person of the Holy Spirit, He indwells our hearts, and empowers us, and lives His life through us.

But there is another sense in which the risen Christ is still dropping in! He promises us in Matthew 18:20, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." Throughout the book of Acts, there are occasions where Jesus reveals Himself in a special manner and performs extraordinary works.

All Christians know from experience there are moments and places where the presence and power of the risen Lord is *expressly sensed* and *tangibly felt*.

I believe John 21 serves as a blueprint to help us recognize the risen Lord's appearances in our lives and to cooperate with His activities... This morning, I want to divide my comments under four headings...

First, **where Jesus shows up.**

Second, **when Jesus shows up.**

Third, **how Jesus shows up.**

And fourth, **why Jesus shows up.**

For I'm convinced the risen Christ wants to drop in on us! The Savior is willing to show up in your life! Yet you need to know *where*, *when*, *how*, and *why* to look.

First, notice **where Jesus shows up**. He engages His disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

It's odd, but Jesus doesn't appear in a synagogue, or at a religious shrine, or even on the Temple Mount.

Rather Jesus reveals Himself **in a very regular, and ordinary, and nondescript spot - on the bank of a lake**. And to guys doing something as humdrum as fishing.

When you survey the dozen or so post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, you'll discover them all - without exception - occur in common, everyday places.

His appearances made the *occasions special*, but He never revealed Himself at a *special occasion*.

When Jesus appeared to His disciples, it was always to interrupt the mundane, and routine, and daily life.

Think back to the events of that first Easter - and the appearances of the risen Christ... What's so special about *two dejected disciples walking down a beaten path from Jerusalem to Emmaus* - Or *ten frightened men cloistered away in an upper room* - Or *a woman weeping in a garden* - Or here in our text, *a handful of fishermen working their favorite bed on the lake?*

Today, **when you go to the place on the shoreline where it's believed these events occurred, you find a little garden and chapel known as "The Church of the Primacy."** The site has been transformed into a sacred spot - holy ground - a stopover for holy land pilgrims.

But in Jesus' day, it was *just a spot*.

There was nothing religious, or special, or sacred, or holy about the place. It was just a plain, unmarked beach... You could call it *“a bore on the shore.”*

In essence, for these *“disciples gone fishing,”* Jesus appeared to them at work - fishing was their trade.

This would be the equivalent of the risen Christ appearing to you tomorrow at the office, or in the break room, or on the assembly line, or on the Marta Train.

We expect Jesus to show up at church - at a religious venue - in a sacred place. Yet His post-resurrection appearances all occurred in secular settings. Jesus was always dropping in on everyday life, in run-of-the-mill places. *He invaded the daily.*

I'll never forget the night Jesus met me in a saving way. It didn't happen for me in a church building. *(At that time in my life, I was pretty turned off to church)...*

But I was learning about Jesus... I knew He was Lord, and I needed to surrender *my life* to *His will*.

And so on a summer night in 1978, I rolled my car into a gravel parking lot... knelt down at a concrete picnic table. There was no stained glass... no praise band... no pastor on duty... *but Jesus showed up!*

The living Lord forgave me of my many sins, took over my life, *and I've never been the same since.*

If the only time you look for Jesus is on Sunday mornings in a house of worship, no wonder you miss Him! *Open your eyes, my friend. He's out and about!*

You're liable to find Jesus at the ballpark, or on the roadside, or in the movie theater, or hanging out in the backyard, or cruising with you in the car, or at the neighbor's house. **Not just the sacred, but the secular is His domain.** Scripture says the Earth is His footstool.

It reminds me of an article I once read in Campus Life Magazine, titled, **"A Tisket, A Tasket, I'm Comin' Outta The Casket."** A South African named George Sogcwe decided to fake his death. He wanted to test his family and see what they would say of him after he'd died.

Imagine, in the middle of the pastor's eulogy the guest of honor pops up out of his coffin. *Surprise!*

George said later he was going to keep the casket for his real funeral... *and let me suggest if he keeps pulling stunts like that it'll be sooner rather than later!*

But with Jesus, it was no joke! **He vacated His tomb. He shed His shroud. In essence, He popped out of His casket.** *Jesus heard what His loved ones said about Him after He was dead. He saw how they treated Him.*

I'm convinced most Christians fall into lapses where we treat Jesus as if He were dead, even when He's not. We forget the Lord lives to work in our lives today.

And just about the time we begin to eulogize Him, Jesus pops up in a dynamic manner. He surprises us all over again. He shows up in new and startling ways.

When I was enrolled in the CCBC in California, one weekend we drove to Las Vegas to spend a few days witnessing on the streets. It was an exciting adventure.

We talked to scores of folk - *a few were even sober.*

I had a roommate who was broke financially. He was down to his last quarter. He wasn't sure how he was getting back home. We were in Caesar's Palace when I saw Lee stick his last quarter into a slot machine.

He actually laid hands on the machine. I'll never forget his prayer, "Lord, I know this is a den of greed and wickedness, but I also know you are above all and can use whatever means you choose to bless your people. I ask You to take my quarter and multiply it."

Then he pulled the lever on that one-armed bandit, and the window read - *not lemon, lemon, lemon - or apple, apple, apple - but 7, 7, 7.* Two hundred quarters came rumbling and tumbling out of that machine...

And you should've seen the look on the lady's face sitting at the slot machine next to him! She almost fell off her stool! I wouldn't be surprised if she's not still there, 40 years later, praying over that slot machine.

Understand, I don't believe God manipulates slot machines on a regular basis and advocates gambling,

but He used that incident to show me He's far bigger than the box I had Him in. The living, loving Jesus can work *anywhere at any time - in any way He chooses!*

Where does Jesus show up? Anywhere! But **when does Jesus show up?** And the answer... **"When you least expect Him, but when you most need Him."**

Notice the disciples are out in the water busily working their nets. Jesus appears on the shore, but they don't know it's Him. Perhaps it was still dark.

Maybe they were a little too far out in the lake to distinguish His features... Or they just didn't expect to see Him and didn't bother to scrutinize the stranger...

Jesus wants to reveal Himself to us, but often, we don't recognize Him either. It's suggested the reason the Holy Spirit names only five of the seven fishermen in the boat is so you and I can take our seat as the unnamed two. Often, the reason we don't recognize the living Lord Jesus is because we don't expect Him.

It reminds me of the church Easter pageant where the play's director was casting the roles. One little boy insisted on being the rock in front of the Garden Tomb.

The director asked, **"Don't you want a speaking part or a role where you can be more involved?"** The little guy was adamant, **"No, I want to be the rock."**

After the performance, the director was still curious about the little boy's choice of roles. He asked him, **"Why did you want to play the rock?"** The boy smiled and said, **"Oh, it felt so good to be first to see Jesus alive!"**

This is the meaning of Easter. The stone was rolled away. We too need to be *moved* by the resurrection!

Don't misunderstand, Jesus is alive and well whether you *believe in Him* or are *affected by Him*.

But the stone was rolled off the mouth of the tomb by the risen Christ - and the truth of the resurrection ought to move us as well. *It should get our faith rolling!*

The living Lord wants to reveal Himself to you. And I believe He drops in on us far more than we realize, but we won't see Him if we're not open and looking...

And one of the biggest causes of our blindness is our own self-sufficiency. We don't look for Jesus because we've learned to *get along - do just fine* - without Him.

Remember, Peter was a fisherman by profession. He had bumbled and stumbled as a disciple - but he knew fishing. Here he's falling back on a former confidence.

That is *until Jesus strips him of his self-assurance*.

The Lord orchestrates a little divinely-inspired emptiness. Notice we're told at the end of verse 3, **"they caught nothing."** Peter and the professionals had fished all night without a bite. Their fishing was a flop.

Notice, God sets up the disciples for a visitation and revelation by allowing them to labor all night in vain. They burn up their energies - end up exhausted. It's a season of failure that primes them for an appearance.

Understand, nothing clouds our spiritual vision like our own successes. It's hard to see Jesus when our nets are full - *when we think we've got it under control*.

You're less likely to see the risen Lord when it's all about you. That's why Jesus lets the disciples try their hand at fishing... then sees to it their nets are empty.

When does Jesus show up? When you least expect Him, but when you most need Him. We'll see Jesus when we're most aware of our need for Him!

But the next question is **how does Jesus show up?** And the answer here is **in a series of subtleties.**

Seldom is an appearance of Jesus announced by angelic trumpets or preceded by handwriting in the sky.

Whenever the risen Christ has appeared to me, it's not been with cracks of thunder and blinding lights.

Remember the occasion when God revealed Himself to Elijah on Mount Horeb. **At first, Elijah beheld a mighty wind that ripped open the side of the mountain.**

The wind was followed by an earthquake that shook the ground... then a blazing fire. But God was not in the wind, or earthquake, or fire. Finally, we're told Elijah heard "a still, small voice" - that was the voice of God!

When Jesus appears, don't expect a drum roll and fanfare. He speaks in *quiet whispers - gentle nudges - calm assurances - eternal priorities - godly desires.*

No parent likes to yell at their kids!

In a perfect world, you'd be able to get a child's attention with a whisper - or even a wink! Likewise, God doesn't like yelling at us to get our attention.

Jesus comes to us through **a series of subtleties...**

No one thing tips off the disciples that the Man on the shore is Jesus. It dawns on them gradually... The truth hits them only after a sequence of perceptions...

Notice Jesus' first words, "*Children, have you any food?*" This is the question every fisherman gets asked. In essence, "*Hey, you guys caught anything?*"

It reminds me of the old fisherman who was asked how many fish he'd caught. He replied, "*I'll tell you, if I catch this one I'm after and two more, I'll have three.*"

Well, the disciples were a little less optimistic, but a lot more honest, they answered the Man, "*None.*"

Notice too, when Jesus addresses His disciples from the shore He uses the word, "*Children.*" One commentator translates the Greek word as "*lads.*"

Jesus was addressing His disciples with a phrase that communicated affection and intimacy and caring...

This was the first in a string of subtleties...

His greeting communicated love. When Jesus first appeared to these same disciples in the upper room, the first words He spoke were, "*peace be with you.*"

Some of us don't look for Jesus to appear for fear of His wrath. We think He's angry at us - that He wants to judge us. Rather than look for the risen Christ, we've failed Him so often, we're really trying to duck Him.

But believe this, you have nothing to fear.

Jesus loves you despite your sin. If you're a believer, He's already forgiven you. He wants you to experience the peace

that a renewed awareness of His presence brings. These disciples were wayward kids - prodigal sons - yet Jesus isn't ashamed to call them His "lads."

And this must've got them thinking... It was the first subtlety that pointed to Jesus. Perhaps they began to wonder - maybe they even asked each other - "Isn't it weird for a stranger to call us "*friends*" and really be concerned over whether we've got anything to eat?"

The second subtlety is Jesus' instructions, "**cast the net on the right side of the boat.**" Though it didn't register at first, the disciples had heard this before!

In Luke 5, when Jesus first called Peter and his pals to follow Him, it was after a similar episode. They'd fished all night and returned to the shore empty-handed. **That's when Jesus told Peter to row back out, throw in his nets... and they took in a miracle catch.**

In a subtle way, here Jesus is reminding them of the first time they realized He was the Son of God.

Now 3½ years later, when Jesus re-enlists them into His service, He primes the pump by using the same circumstances. He stirs up the beginnings of their faith.

When God brings His former works to mind, it's often His way of preparing us for a new and future work.

God isn't into reminiscing just for old times' sake... He's not sentimental without a purpose for being so!

When God recalls a past victory or lesson, it's to prepare us for lessons and victories that lie ahead.

As the fishermen are laughing, and celebrating, and dragging in their stretching nets, it suddenly hits John.

The string of subtleties suddenly come together.

The tumblers all fall into place... the name "*children,*" *His caring, the circumstances, now the catch* - the puzzle pieces come together... this is Jesus! And as soon as it hits him, John shouts... **"It's the Lord."**

And I love that line! What an incredible experience it is when you suddenly recognize His purpose behind the randomness. You weren't expecting it - you didn't see it coming - but a miracle sneaked up behind you, and slapped its hands over your eyes, and said, "*Guess who?*" By then you know... **"It's the Lord."**

There's an expression among Christians that sums up these experiences. When Jesus surprises... when the subtleties mount up... when you conclude, **"It's the Lord"** - someone might say, **"That's a God thing."**

And that's John's reaction here! When it dawns on him the Man on the beach is Jesus - John is the first person to shout, **It's a God thing - "It's the Lord!"**

And notice John is the first of the disciples to recognize that it's Jesus. He doesn't call himself by his given name - he uses his pen name, **"the disciple who Jesus loved."** And that points to a profound connection.

The disciple that cultivated the most intimate relationship with Jesus was the first to recognize Him.

Recall, John was the disciple that leaned in on Jesus at the Last Supper... At the cross, Jesus committed the care of His

mother, Mary, over to John... Jesus loved and trusted John. I believe Jesus loved John so dearly, because His love was so quickly returned by John.

And understand the pattern. **The people who love Jesus most are usually the first to sense His presence.**

I'm convinced Jesus is constantly dropping in, but if I want to be quick to recognize Him - then I need to cultivate a personal and spiritual intimacy with Him.

It's when I spend time with Him, and read His Word, and pray, and let His Spirit stir my passions and enlighten my understanding - then I'll be quick to see **"It's the Lord."** I'll be first to recognize the subtleties.

Well, so far, we've answered three questions...

Where does Jesus show up? Anywhere.

When does Jesus show up? When we least expect Him, but when we need Him most.

How does Jesus show up? In a series of subtleties.

And now our final question, ***why does Jesus show up?*** And there are two ways to answer this question...

We could put it, **Jesus drops in on us to turn our ship around...** This is what happened to the disciples.

They were busy with the business of fishing until it dawned on them the stranger on the shore was Jesus.

That's when they immediately steered their ship in His direction. *They turned their little boat about-face.*

In fact, Peter couldn't even wait to turn the boat around. When he knew it was the Lord, he left the boat behind, dove into the lake, and swam for the shore.

You've got to love Peter's enthusiasm, even while you mourn his common sense. Read verse 7 again, "Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea." *Ok, why put on your coat and then jump into the water?* Obviously, Peter's only thought was "*get to Jesus*" - and this is what happens when you see that *it's the Lord*, He eclipses all your other concerns.

When Jesus shows up, it creates a shift in direction. *When He crosses your path, your path gets altered.*

Jesus comes with new bearings - new coordinates. He plots a new course. Jesus takes over the steering.

A second way to put it would be when Jesus drops in it always produces "*a transformational moment.*"

Life does not remain the same after Jesus comes on the scene. Jesus doesn't come to endorse the status quo. He rocks the boat. He comes to do a new work.

Jesus is into transformation! He works *big changes*.

Raymond Donovan served as Secretary of Labor under President Reagan. Donovan tells about a trip he made with the former President on Air Force One.

Initially, he was in the rear of the plane with other staff, but halfway through the flight, he was asked to join the President for lunch in his private quarters.

Ray Donovan straightened his tie and thought to himself how important he was having lunch on Air Force One with the President of the United States...

To top it all off, when he walked into the President's stateroom, the red phone, *the hotline*, suddenly rang.

Donovan thought, "Wow, what a moment to be with the leader of the free world. He's about to deal with a national emergency... and I'm going to be by his side."

Reagan calmly picked up the phone, listened for a few short minutes, and asked, "What are my options?"

Donovan's heart skipped a beat. His mind raced back and forth to the possible international scenarios that might be brewing. Finally, the president answered, "Ok, I'll have the iced tea!" and hung up the hotline... *So much for Ray's part in a transformational moment.*

But know when Jesus invites you for a meal you can be sure He has very sensitive and strategic issues to discuss. He deals with matters of eternal significance.

When the disciples came ashore, they found a fire of coals and broiling fish - but this wasn't a typical fish fry.

Here's where the Greek words translated "*coals*" and "*fish*" come in handy... "*Coals*" is "*anthrakia*," the same word used for the fire of coals Peter huddled over several weeks earlier on the night he denied his Lord.

The word for "*fish*" is "*opsarion*." The word John used to describe the two fish with which Jesus fed the 5000.

It was immediately after the miracle of multiplication that Peter had recommitted himself. Jesus had asked the disciples if they were going to leave Him, as the multitudes had done - but Peter responded, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

The point is when the risen Christ dropped in on Peter, *He dropped right into His heart*. **With the coals**, He takes Peter back to the night of his defeat. **With the fish**, He reminds him of his commitment to still follow.

And when Jesus appears to you and me, the truth comes out in the open. Skeletons topple from the closet.

Smokescreens dissipate. The real issues surface.

When Jesus drops in, it forces us to face the truth about ourselves. Jesus can't turn our ship around until we recognize we're headed in the wrong direction.

I had a friend who used to drop in unannounced.

Early in our marriage, he would drop by the house and surprise us with a visit. He'd show up, knock on the door - and if the door was unlocked, he'd walk on in.

With *my newlywed wife's gentle coaxing*, I explained to my friend this was no longer the acceptable protocol.

But realize this is exactly how Jesus rolls. The risen Christ has no qualms about dropping in unannounced. He comes *when we least expect Him but most need Him*. Jesus loves us and wants to turn our ship around.

In verse 12, Jesus is standing on the beach when He invites His disciples, "Come and eat breakfast."

And it's striking to me that Jesus invited His disciples to "*breakfast*" - *the first meal of a new day*. The whole experience in John 21 happened early in the morning.

In fact, most of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances occurred in the *AM*. His first drop-in - to Mary, outside the tomb, is at dawn - the break of day. It's appropriate that all this in John 21 *dawns* on the disciples at *dawn*.

Whenever Jesus drops in, it marks a brand new day.

Recall, how we divide history - *there's BC and AD*.

"*B.C.*" stands for "*Before Christ*." And of course, *BC* is also the name of a powder that relieves headaches.

And to me this is so fitting, for my life *before Christ - the BC days* - was just that - one, big headache!

"*A.D.*" though is a Latin abbreviation. "*Anno Domini*" means "*Year of our Lord*." And it was the resurrection of Jesus that marked a new era, a new day on Earth!

A time now influenced and dominated by Jesus.

Whether you're 13, or 43, or 83 when the risen Christ drops into your life, it marks the beginning of a brand new life. Jesus invites us to breakfast, not nightcaps.

And notice again in verse 12, Jesus says, "*Come...*"

Author John Phillips makes a big deal of this word "*come*." He writes, "*Come! It is the grandest word in the Gospel. It dissolves distance. It brings saint and sinner alike to Him who takes away sin and sadness and replaces them with joy and gladness.*"

For centuries prior to Christ, man had been separated from God. We were **barred** from His presence.

In fact, when God revealed Himself to Israel on Mount Sinai, they roped off the mountain so no one would wander too close. Imagine, God was “**off-limits.**”

But what Jesus did on the cross caused God to bury the hatchet. God is no longer angry with man over his sin. Jesus paid the price and won God’s forgiveness.

And today, just as He did on the shore that morning, Jesus invites whosoever will to **“come.”** This one marvelous word *ends our imposed separation.* You and I have been invited by the risen Christ to *come* to Him!

If you're not a Christian, here's Jesus' word to you, **“Come...”** *Come to Him. He'll wash away your sins!*

And if you are a Christian, yes, Jesus is always with you. But He also wants to make His presence known to you in a personal way. *He wants to drop in on you!*

That's why we should prepare our hearts with faith and anticipation so that when the risen Christ does drop in, you and I will be the first to say, **“It's the Lord.”**