

Last week, we heard the last story, the final narrative about Jesus and his disciples along with John's tidy conclusion, the end of his gospel.

This story follows that; it comes after the end.

It is more than an error or an encore or an epilogue; it is a lesson.

John is a disciple, which is to say, a student and follower of Jesus, the one he calls Teacher.

As a student of the Teacher, he has himself learned to teach.

He writes his book in such a way that after it is finished, it continues.

He doesn't just write about resurrection, about life after the end; he demonstrates it.

This is what good teachers do.

They do more than explain the subject, they show it, they model it, they teach both in words and in actions.

Jesus, the good teacher, did this.

He taught the disciples a lesson about loving and serving one another first by doing, then by explaining.

He washed their feet, then started talking: *Do you know what I have done to you?*

*You call me Teacher and Lord--and you are right, for that is what I am.*

*So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.*

*For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.*

Even good teachers, however, have students who struggle.

Jesus had a couple in his class, one of whom was so thick he nicknamed him Rock, or in Greek, Peter.

Simon Rock first objected to the whole foot-washing lesson, then misunderstood it.

It is no surprise, then, that he is going to need some special attention, and today, in the Easter firelight, he receives it.

Jesus has three instructions for him: *feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep.*

But Jesus doesn't just give him homework.

He shows him how to do it by doing it for him--not doing Peter's work for him, but by doing the work *for him*.

Jesus moves, step by step, through this story, first feeding Peter the lamb, then tending Peter the sheep, then feeding Peter the sheep.

It begins with Peter the lamb wandering off to fish, returning childlike to an old, familiar, well worn way of life from before the resurrection and the life.

Impetuous and confident, he goes out at night, where he can't even catch a cold.

Jesus calls to him and his friends, *Children...* which is human for *lambs...* and Peter responds just like Adam, the man-child at the infancy of his race, covering his nakedness in a futile attempt to hide from God.

Jesus stokes the fire, turns the fish and bread, and feeds his lamb.

Once the lamb has been fed, and grows into a sheep capable of hauling in himself and his net and sitting down and paying attention, Jesus tends to him.

He shepherds him with three questions, and three instructions, setting him in a new direction, guiding him from fishing to feeding, from jumping ship to shepherding.

And at the third instruction, *Feed my sheep*, he feeds his sheep named Peter with the truth and the hearty invitation he was not yet ready for before.

*Very truly, I tell you...when you were younger...but when you grow old...follow me.*

*Feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep.*

*You also should do as I have done to you.*

*Follow me.*

Peter will do this, of course, by also glorifying God with his own death at cruel Roman hands.

It sounds to us like a terrible ending to his story, but keep in mind that the end of the story isn't really the end.

Keep in mind, also, that this is what Peter most deeply and desperately wanted...but was unable to do for himself.

This is the point where Jesus is not just Teacher, but Lord.

He not only instructs Peter, he redeems him, restores him, saves him, transforms him from Simon Rock to Rock Star, from flailing fisherman to faithful follower.

Listen in on another snippet from class on that night of the foot-washing.

The Lord and Teacher is speaking.

*Where I am going, you cannot come.*

*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.*

*Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.*

*By this everyone will know that you are my students, if you have love for one another.*

*Simon Rock said to him, "Lord, where are you going?"*

*Jesus answered, "Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterward."*

*Rock said to him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now?"*

*I will lay down my life for you."*

*Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me?"*

*Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times.*

After class, they went outside into a cold night.

Jesus was arrested and interrogated, and Rock followed, like he said he would.

He stood outside, warming himself near a charcoal fire, when he was asked three times whether he was a student and follower of Jesus.

Three times he answered the question No, and then the cock warbled judgment.

And that moment, in the smoky shadows of denial, is the last glimpse we have of Simon Rock, the sad end of his story.

But now, we are beyond the end, at the beginning.

Night gives way to morning as death gives way to life.

Jesus, who can feed his lambs any way he wants, decides to build a charcoal fire.

In its warmth and light, he asks Rock three questions, three chances to say yes, three make-up tests to turn that F into an A.

Step by detailed step, he shepherds Peter from failure to follower, moving the Rock like he does every Easter morning.

Now Simon Rock can follow.

Now he can lay down his life and die.

Now his story can end so that his story can begin.

Simon Rock's old story continues, of course, and we are a part of it.

He fed lambs, tended sheep, fed sheep, nourishing and guiding more followers of Jesus the Lord and Teacher, more students, more disciples, more rock stars and rock-heads like us and, now, including us.

We gather once more in the gathering light of morning after another week of good ideas and frustrations over nets that are empty and frustrations over nets that are too full.

We haul ourselves here with a mixture of curiosity and dedication and desperation and faith to stare into the charcoal mystery and be nourished by the One who is both stranger and savior, both Teacher and Lord.

Bring some of whatever by God's weird, right side of the boat grace you've caught...tote bags, fish, money, bread, wine, juice, portable toiletries for the homeless, whatever offerings you have dragged in with you.

Come and have breakfast.

Be nourished, so that you may nourish.

Receive Communion until you learn how to feed and forgive others.

Be washed until that you may wash others.

Be blessed, be loved, so that you may learn how to love and bless others.

Come to the meal, bringing whatever you have and whatever you are, and pay attention.

Jesus is not only feeding you, but teaching you how to feed, demonstrating how to love, attentively showing you how to follow.

He is shepherding you, step by detailed step, to what you most dearly and desperately hope for, whether you know what it is or not.

Of course, you may not get there.

You may not reach your destiny or your desires or your dreams.

You may end up stretched out, taken where you do not want to go.

Your story may end badly.

Simon Rock's did.

So did his Lord and Teacher's.

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Thank God the end is followed by the beginning.