

# Called Deeper

*Part 3 of a 3-part series reflecting on the ending(s) of John's Gospel, ch20 & 21.*

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Last week our journey through the ending(s) to John's gospel took us to the shore of Galilee to Peter and some of the other disciples having fun fishing on the lake, meeting the risen Jesus and enjoying fresh fish with him around a campfire. Friends enjoying breakfast together as the sun breaks on the shore.

This week we pick back up where that scene left us, because as breakfast is finished and the campfire moves from flames to glowing embers, Jesus turns to Simon Peter and asks him 'Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?'

It feels like a change of pace in the story – we move from an intimate breakfast with friends perhaps having fun and laughter together, to an intimate and deep 1 to 1 between Jesus and Peter.

*"Yes Lord, you know that I love you."* comes Peters' reply.

I wonder how he spoke those words. What his tone and body language was? Was Peter filled with confidence and conviction, as he must have been moments before when he had jumped into the water and waded to shore. Or was he filled with remorse and guilt, his denying Jesus that night in the Jerusalem courtyard coming back to haunt him?

This conversation repeats, 3 times in total Jesus ask Peter do you love me, each time Peter responds, "yes Lord you know me, everything about me, you know, you know I love you."

It is interesting and perhaps not surprising given how we often find numbers used within scriptures storytelling, that after Peter 3 times denied, Jesus asks him 3 times 'do you love me'.

I wonder if, for Peter, there was something redemptive and transformative in that being asked 3 times – if it helped him to find forgiveness and wholeness after his 3

times denying Jesus. But let's not get Jesus wrong, there is no suggestion here that our wrongdoing, our guilt, our sin, needs to then be corrected by actions, words and works that go in the other direction – as if we have to rebalance the scales. That's not how Jesus' love and care for us works.

Jesus is not reprimanding Peter. Yes, he is asking a question, but it seems to me that this conversation is a gentle, friendly, loving one between 2 friends in a corner on the beach after sharing fish sarnies.

Each time Jesus responds to Peter in a similar way.

*Feed my lambs. (v15b)*

*Tend (or shepherd) my sheep. (v16b)*

*Feed by sheep. (v17b)*

Different words – and there may be some significant to the nuances there, but a common thrust. In just a few small words Jesus calls Peter deeper, responding with love, acceptance, welcome, forgiveness and commissioning to serve the flock of Christ.

Sometimes I wonder if, as we see this encounter move from the fun and laughter of breakfast to this 1 to 1 with Jesus, we think Peter is expecting to get his comeuppance for his denying. But Peter knew Jesus, and I wonder if Peter would have been expecting the exact opposite. Expecting Jesus would forgive and love and accept him, and still call him deeper – and feeling guilt and shame because he didn't think he was worthy of it.

I wonder if this challenges some of our assumptions as Christians about how we think about our own worth. I wonder if we too often feel guilt and shame more intensely than we should or than Jesus ever intended us to. I wonder if we expect reprimand when Jesus just wants us to receive his love, and love him too. I wonder if we have allowed the notion of sin to become a barrier in our relationship with Jesus and our responding to his call to go deeper.

Jesus says to you today: do you love me? Friend, no matter what I love you. I forgive you and I still call you. Come deeper with me, serve me, follow me.