

Do you love me?



The Meal - Jesus and his Apostles | James Tissot, ca.1890 | Brooklyn Museum | PD-US

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when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.”¹⁹ He said this signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when he had said this, he said to him, “Follow me.” (John 21:1-19)

Post-Easter Gospels

Each Easter season the gospels are always taken from the Gospel of John. This is intentional and deeply theological. By consistently drawing from John during Easter, the Church ensures a theological and spiritual progression from the Resurrection to the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, helping the faithful grow in understanding and living out the Paschal Mystery drawing on the following:

Johannine Themes of Resurrection and New Life - The Gospel of John provides a profound theological reflection on Jesus’ Resurrection, emphasizing themes of new life, belief, and the presence of the risen Christ among His disciples. These themes align perfectly with the Easter season, which celebrates Christ’s victory over death and the new life He offers.

Post-Resurrection Appearances - Many of the post-Resurrection accounts, including Jesus’ encounters with Mary Magdalene, Thomas, and the disciples by the Sea of Galilee, are found in John (chapters 20–21). These readings reinforce the reality of the Resurrection and its transformative power in the lives of believers.

The Good Shepherd and the Promise of the Holy Spirit - The Fourth Sunday of Easter is traditionally known as “Good Shepherd Sunday,” and the Gospel is always taken from John 10, where Jesus describes Himself as the Good Shepherd. The later Sundays of Easter (especially leading up to Pentecost) feature readings from John 14–17, known as the “Farewell Discourse”, where Jesus promises the coming of the Holy Spirit, preparing the Church for Pentecost.

Liturgical Continuity and Catechesis - The Easter season is a time of mystagogy—a deepening of faith for the newly baptized. The Gospel of John, with its rich sacramental theology (e.g., Baptism, Eucharist, the gift of the Holy Spirit), provides ideal material for instructing and strengthening the faithful.

Context and the Scholars

These verses are the final chapter in the Gospel according to John. Immediately preceding this chapter are these verses: “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of (his) disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may (come to) believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name.” (John 20:30-31)

Such are the closing verses at the end of the so-called “Doubting Thomas” narrative of John’s gospel (“Believing Thomas” is the better #hashtag). It reads as a great ending to the whole gospel. That is why many scholars argue that John 21 is an addition to an original Gospel version that concluded at the end of John 20. But the problem with that view is that John 21 is found in every ancient manuscript of the Gospel that we possess and, if it was appended, must have been appended almost with the original publication of the work.

Scholars offer two basic grounds for considering John 21 an added epilogue: “(1) John 20:30–31 brings the Gospel to a close, and (2) Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances in John 21 introduce an ecclesial focus that is secondary and anticlimactic to the concerns of John 1–20.” [O’Day, 854] But then such an opinion seems somewhat circular. Their “decision about the status of chap. 21 is largely based on how it fits scholars’ theological preconceptions about how the Gospel of John should end. Beasley-Murray, for example, writes that John 21 ‘has an emphasis on the situation of the Church and its leaders beyond anything in the body of the Gospel.’” [O’Day, *op.cit*] That presupposes that Jesus had no intention of anything/one taking up his earthly ministry in any way/shape/form – which seems an odd position in the

light of John 14-17. A more supportable position (it seems to me) is that John 21 is placed exactly where it needs to be with a focus on the ecclesial dimensions at the start of the church's mission. O'Day [854-55] nicely outlines such a view:

There is a distinction between the focus of John 20 and that of John 21, but it is a distinction that is integral to the scope and movement of the Gospel narrative. In 20:1–31, the narrative and theological focus rests on the completion of Jesus' glorification. Thomas's proclamation, "My Lord and my God" (20:28), signals the fulfillment of Jesus' prayer of 17:1–5; Jesus is glorified in God's presence. But Jesus' prayer at his hour looks beyond his own glorification to the future life of the believing community (17:6–26), and the stories of John 21 point explicitly to that future. It is inaccurate, therefore, to state that John 21:1–25 introduces ecclesial concerns that are not integral to the Gospel. In John 16:2–3, for example, Jesus predicted the future persecution and martyrdom of members of the community, predictions that are revisited in the stories of Peter and the beloved disciple in 21:15–24. Throughout chaps. 13–17, Jesus spoke of his hopes and promises for the life of the faith community (e.g., 14:12; 15:12–27; 17:17–18, 20; cf. 19:26–27), and John 21:1–25 offers a narrative conclusion to those hopes.

In addition to the narrative and theological flow, John 21 is tied to the previous chapters by a host of literary and theological links. Johannine characteristics found in this chapter are the

- Sea of Tiberias (v.1; near the site of the miraculous feeding of John 6:1-14);
- names of Simon Peter, Thomas the Twin, Nathanael from Cana in v.2;
- night-day contrast of vv. 3–4;
- lack of recognition in v.4;
- Beloved Disciple of v.7, who relates to Peter and who first recognizes the Lord;
- charcoal fire of v.9, together with the image of Jesus as servant and giver of bread to the disciples;
- reference in v.14 to two previous appearances (in ch. 20);
- Peter's triple profession (vv. 15–17) to counterbalance the triple denial and to reintroduce the shepherd theme (ch. 10);
- glorifying aspect of Peter's death in v.19;
- reference to the Beloved Disciple's position next to Jesus at the Last Supper in v.20.

If not John himself, then this was added by an expert in John's thought — surely by one of his disciples, and by one thoroughly conversant with the Gospel material. If this chapter is an addition, it is nonetheless a beautiful addition, and the Christian community would be considerably poorer without it.

Apart from all scholarly opinion, John 21 is part of the canonical Gospel according to John.

Commentary

Futile Fishing

¹ After this, Jesus revealed himself again to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. He revealed himself in this way. ² Together were Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, Zebedee's sons, and two others of his disciples. ³ Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We also will come with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Many quickly pass over the beginning of this passage to move to the miraculous catch signaling the presence of Jesus on the shoreline. But to do so would be to miss the "apostolic roll call." We should be surprised to hear Simon Peter and Thomas on the list, those who figured so prominently after the Transfiguration, before the raising of Lazarus, and in the post-Resurrection appearances. But what about Nathanael — why is he listed? This is his first appearance since John 1:45-50 when Jesus promised him

that he would see “*greater things*,” and certainly Jesus’ appearance signals the fulfillment of that promise. And why are they in Galilee and why are they fishing? The answer that usually arises is that Jesus told Mary to tell the brothers to go to Galilee... but not in John’s gospel. In fact they might be just what they did, waiting for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit given in 20:21. But might not John have a symbolic reason for the fishing scene?

Perhaps it is to return to where the public ministry began in Galilee – Cana where the miracle of the water/wine was prelude to the ministry and now the miraculous catch will be the prelude to the mission of the Church. In both instances, they are miracles of abundance and the means of revelation to the disciples. But then again, some scholars have offered the Galilean fishing event as a sign of the men’s apostasy: “*Behold, the hour is coming and has arrived when each of you will be scattered to his own home and you will leave me alone.*” (John 16:32) Simon Peter is back at his old job of fishing? If he had seen the risen Jesus twice before, if he had received the commission “*as the Father has sent me, so I send you*” (20:21), what’s he doing back in the boat? Some scholars see the event as parallel to the other gospels’ call narratives (Matt 4:18–22; Mark 1:16–20; Luke 5:10), here serving also as a commissioning. Perhaps it is just “what-do-we-do-now” aimlessness while we figure things out.

Why ever they are in Galilee fishing, they are having no success: “*that night they caught nothing.*”

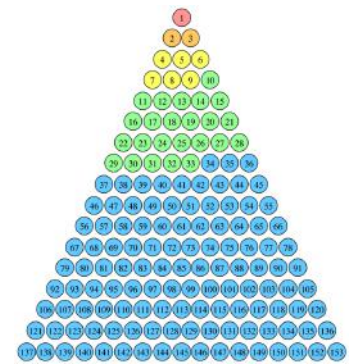
Fantastic Fishing

⁴ *When it was already dawn, Jesus was standing on the shore; but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.* ⁵ *Jesus said to them, “Children, have you caught anything to eat?” They answered him, “No.”* ⁶ *So he said to them, “Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something.” So they cast it, and were not able to pull it in because of the number of fish.*

The Sea of Tiberias (v. 1) is a Johannine locale (6:22–23), and the fishing companions are, in general, already known to us, with the exception of “Zebedee’s sons,” who here make their only appearance in the Fourth Gospel. Among the “two other disciples,” seemingly, is the Beloved Disciple (v.7). The lack of success during the night, followed by enormous success with the daylight presence of Jesus (vv. 3–6), is a practical application of John’s frequent comments about night and day, light and darkness. The appearance of Jesus [w]hen it was already dawn echoes the scene in the garden with Mary Magdalene – the disciples’ fail to recognize Jesus as did Mary (20:14), and similarly, the Beloved Disciple is the first to recognize the Lord (v. 7).

Jesus reinitiates contact with the disciples addressing them as children (*paidia*). The form of address is unique to the fourth gospel and points to an authority rooted in intimacy. This authority must have been intuitively sensed, for even after a fruitless night of fishing, tired and ready to “call it a night”, the disciples dutifully cast the nets again. On their own they had caught nothing, but in response to Jesus’ command, there is a phenomenal catch of fish (cf. 4:50, 53; 5:8; 11:43).

The mention of precisely 153 fish (v. 11) has led to symbolic interpretations of all kinds. And indeed, there must be symbolism involved (unless one assumes that the disciples took time out to make a count). Saint Jerome believed that the zoology of his time taught that there were 153 different kinds of fish; and the number, as a result, reflected universality. Jerome was probably incorrect about the zoologists of his own day, but his idea about universal symbolism was probably correct. Augustine of Hippo argued that the significance lay in the fact that 153 is the sum of the first 17 integers with 17 representing the combination of divine grace (the 7 gifts of the Spirit) and law (the Ten Commandments). Augustine goes farther and notes that “153” is the “triangular number.” He arrives at this conclusion noting that $153=1!+2!+3!+4!+5!$ (math refresher: factorials). When the factorials are arranged (see diagram), one sees an image of the Trinity. (Sorry: I was a math major undergraduate, and just had to include this...!)



Over time there have been a host of theories, but the scholar D. A. Carson discusses this and other interpretations and concludes “If the Evangelist has some symbolism in mind connected with the number 153, he has hidden it well.” Perhaps we can let Carson have the last word.

Coming Ashore

⁷ So the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord.” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he tucked in his garment, for he was lightly clad, and jumped into the sea. ⁸ The other disciples came in the boat, for they were not far from shore, only about a hundred yards, dragging the net with the fish. ⁹ When they climbed out on shore, they saw a charcoal fire with fish on it and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you just caught.” ¹¹ So Simon Peter went over and dragged the net ashore full of one hundred fifty-three large fish. Even though there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, “Come, have breakfast.” And none of the disciples dared to ask him, “Who are you?” because they realized it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came over and took the bread and gave it to them, and in like manner the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time Jesus was revealed to his disciples after being raised from the dead.

O’Day [857] points out that this “miraculous catch of fish is the direct catalyst for the beloved disciple’s recognition of Jesus (v. 7a). His announcement of Jesus’ identity is couched in the language of the Easter proclamation: “It is the Lord” (cf. 20:18, 20, 25, 28). The two earlier Galilean miracles provide a clue in identifying what it is about the catch of fish that evokes the beloved disciple’s recognition. In the Cana miracle (2:1–11), the disciples saw Jesus’ glory in the abundance of good wine; the feeding miracle of 6:1–14 also points to the abundance of Jesus’ gifts. In this miracle, too, the beloved disciple recognizes the abundance of fish as deriving from the fullness of Jesus’ gifts (cf. 1:14, 16).” The beloved disciple is again the first to recognize what he sees (cf. 20:8), while Peter responds with his characteristic eagerness, dramatically, jumping in to the sea. A number of translations have Peter “naked” (*gymnos*) and then “putting on” (*diazonymmi*) clothes. Given that the latter word more literally means, “tucks into,” the alternative meaning for *gymnos* (lightly clad) seems more reasonable. Brown [1072] suggests a more logical picture of Peter being clad only in his fisherman’s smock (*ependytes*) -- without the normal undergarments – hence lightly dressed. Still, if one opts for Peter and nakedness, one can say Peter is caught between a desire to meet Jesus with respect and his eagerness to meet him immediately.

Meanwhile the other disciples haul the amazing catch ashore. The verb “to haul” (*helko*) is the same verb used in 6:44 to describe those who come to Jesus from God – “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw (*helko*) him, and I will raise him on the last day.” It is also used in 12:32 – “And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw (*helko*) everyone to myself.” This wording suggests that the disciples now join God and Jesus in drawing people to Jesus. The catch of fish, then, marks the extension of God and Jesus’ work into the disciples’ work. This story thus stands as the narrative fulfillment of Jesus’ promises to his disciples in the Farewell Discourse that they will share in his works (14:12; 15:5, 7–8, 16; cf. 17:18, 20–21).

The charcoal fire (v. 9) serves a double purpose. It sets the scene for Jesus’ servant role as he becomes giver of bread (and fish) to the disciples and also serves as a stage prop for Peter’s profession of love, recalling the previous charcoal fire (18:18), next to which Peter had denied the Lord. Another symbolic possibility at this point is drawn from the fact that the disciples bring the catch (humankind) to the meal (Eucharist) prepared by the risen Lord. O’Day [858] points out that “Verses 9–13 focus on Jesus’ identity as the source of life for the disciples. This identity is highlighted in two interrelated scenes: Jesus’ offer of a meal to his disciples (vv. 9, 12–13) and the attestation of the abundance of the miracle (vv. 10–11).

Following the landing of the fish, Jesus said to them, ‘Come, have breakfast’ – inviting them to the intimacy of a meal. The meal of v. 9 is the same food as that of 6:1–14, “fish” (*opsarion*) and “bread” (*artos*). Jesus’ preparation of this meal for his disciples confirms that he is the giver of gifts, the source of life-sustaining nourishment (4:13–14; 6:35, 51; 7:37; 10:9).

The next statement is puzzling: *And none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they realized it was the Lord.* It reflects some lingering doubts. Despite these lingering doubts, they did not dare ask, 'Who are you?' Intuitively they knew it was the Lord. What Jesus did next would have removed any last traces of doubt: Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. They had seen him do this before for a multitude (6:1–13), just as they had heard him tell them on a previous occasion where to net many fish (Luke 5:4–9). Together these things removed any doubt that it was the Lord they were encountering. Perhaps this is the Johannine "Road to Emmaus" when the disciples fully recognize Jesus in the breaking of the bread.

Do you love me?

¹⁵ *When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs."* ¹⁶ *He then said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep."* ¹⁷ *He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was distressed that he had said to him a third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." (Jesus) said to him, "Feed my sheep.*

This encounter of Peter with his risen Lord is filled with beautiful material. Jesus offers Peter a public opportunity to profess repentance through love, surely a striking example of what it is that reestablishes our relationship with the Lord after sin. The One who Peter denied at the charcoal fire, restores Peter at another charcoal fire. The threefold denial is forgiven by this threefold profession of love.

This encounter is also a recommissioning of Simon Peter. It begins, *When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"* The name "Simon, son of John," used in all three verses, provides an important link with Peter's first appearance in the Fourth Gospel. The risen Jesus' use of this name repeats the words he spoke when he first met Peter ("You are Simon son of John," 1:42) and once more portrays Jesus as the good shepherd who knows the name of his sheep (cf. 20:16). But what is being asked of Simon Peter?

Jesus could have been asking whether Peter loved him (1) more than the other disciples who were present did; after all Peter had boasted during the Last Supper that he (more than the others) was willing to lay his life down for Jesus. Perhaps Jesus was asking if Peter loved him (2) more than he loved those other disciples or (3) more than the large catch of fish, the boats and fishing gear. The second is unlikely because there is no mention elsewhere of Peter's love for the other disciples. The third is possible if one thinks that Peter's decision to go fishing (21:3) represented a turning away from Jesus to go back to his old trade. If this is unlikely, then the first option is to be preferred, remembering that Peter had been the most forward in asserting his dedication to Jesus (13:37–38; cf. Matt. 26:33). The first option is the most likely.

In answer to Jesus' question, Peter said, *Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.* Peter's response was positive, but involved no bold claims like those he had made previously. He simply said that his Lord knew the truth about his love for him. In response to Peter's affirmation of love for him, Jesus said, 'Feed my lambs.' His commission to Peter was to feed (*boske*) his 'lambs' (*arnia*), meaning he was to provide spiritual nourishment for new believers.

This verse (v.15) establishes the basic pattern that is repeated with minimal variation in vv. 16–17: Jesus' question of Peter's love for him; Peter's affirmation of his love; Jesus' charge to feed/care for his sheep. Two different verbs for "to love" are used in vv. 15–17: *agapaō*, vv. 15a, 16a and *phileō*, vv. 15b, 16b, 17. These verbs are used as synonyms throughout the Gospel, with no difference in meaning. For example, both verbs are used to speak of "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (*ēgapa*, 13:23; *ephilei*, 20:2); God's love of Jesus (*agapa*, 10:17; *philei*, 5:20); God's love for the disciples (*agapēsei*, 14:23; *philei*, 16:27); and the

disciples' love of Jesus (*agapa*, 14:23; *pephilēkate*, 16:27). There is no reason, therefore, to ascribe gradations of meaning to their usage here (as do many commentaries).

There seems to be no real difference between Jesus' three commands: "*Feed my lambs*," "*Tend my sheep*," to which is added the composite "*Feed my sheep*." The language continues the shepherd theme of John 10. The function of Yahweh-shepherd in Ezek 34 passes to Jesus-shepherd in John 10 to Peter-shepherd in John 21. It is important to note how Peter's shepherd role is tied to love (vv. 15–17) and to a willingness (like the good shepherd of 10:11–18) to lay down his life (vv. 18–19). Note, too, how Peter's laying down his life glorified God, as did that of Jesus. Love, love to the limit, selfless, life-giving love manifests (glorifies) God because that is God's nature. An act of selfless, life-giving love is God's name published before the world.

Brain Stofregen notes that Jesus said in 10:11: "*I am the good shepherd [poimen]. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*" Although Jesus never refers to Peter as a shepherd [*poimen*], he does tell him "to shepherd" [*poimaino*] his sheep." Like the "good shepherd" of ch. 10, Jesus indicates that Peter will die. In the upper room, Jesus had this conversation with Peter: "*Simon Peter said to [Jesus], 'Lord, where are you going?'* Jesus answered, "*Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterward. Peter 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.*" (13:36-38). Jesus tells Peter at the end of our text, "Follow me." What Jesus tells Peter he cannot do earlier, he now tells him to do. Following Jesus -- for Peter -- means death. Peter's response, "Yes, I love you," involves the commitment of his entire life."

Following Jesus

¹⁸ *Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.* ¹⁹ *He said this signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when he had said this, he said to him, "Follow me."*

This enigmatic statement contrasts Peter's experience during his youth, when he dressed himself and went wherever he pleased, with what was to happen to him when he grew old. His independence would be stripped away. He would be forced to stretch out his hands and others would 'clothe' him and lead him to a place he would not wish to go. Stretching out the hands is an allusion to the way those to be crucified were forced to stretch out their arms and bear the cross beam to the place of execution (cf. Barnabas 12:4; Justin, I Apology, 35). The evangelist leaves us in no doubt about the intention of this saying: Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Peter is known to have suffered a violent death (1 Clement 5:4) by crucifixion (Tertullian, *Scorpiace* xv.3), and 21:18–19 is the earliest testimony to his martyrdom by this means. Jesus' next words to Peter were most apt: Then he said to him, '*Follow me!*' Peter was to take up his cross literally and follow Jesus.

When this chapter was written, Peter's death was already an accomplished fact. Like his Lord (note the "You follow me" of v. 22), he had already stretched out his hands (v. 18) to die on Vatican hill. The tying fast (v. 18) would be the fastening to the cross, always accomplished in part by ropes.

At 13:37, Peter expressed his willingness to lay down his life for Jesus, a boast that Jesus rejected (13:38). Verses 18–19 show that now Peter is able to do what he could not do before: lay down his life in love.

Notes

General: There are many non-Johannine peculiarities in this chapter, some suggesting Lucan Greek style; yet this passage is closer to John's style than John 7:53-8:11. There are many Johannine features as well. Its closest parallels in the synoptic gospels are found in Luke 5:1-11 and Matthew 14:28-31. Perhaps the tradition was ultimately derived from John but preserved by some disciple other than the writer of the rest of the gospel.

21:1 revealed: *phaneroō*; this verb is not used anywhere in the NT to speak of resurrection appearance – and hardly at all, other than in *John* where it is used to speak of the revelation that takes place in Jesus (1:31, 2:11, 3:21, 7:4, 9:3, 17:6). The use of this verb speaks to more than a simple resurrection story. Rather indicates that there is more to be revealed in this passage than just the physical appearance.

21:2 Zebedee's sons: the only reference to James and John in this gospel. Perhaps the phrase was originally a gloss to identify, among the five, the two others of his disciples. The total of seven may suggest the community of the disciples in its fullness.

21:3 I am going fishing: This story may well be the same as that recounted in Luke 5:4–10. Luke purposely limits Christ's resurrection activities to the area of Jerusalem, so he placed this Galilee story in chapter 5 of his Gospel for its rich homiletic advantage. Called to be fishers of men and women, the disciples can catch nothing without the assistance of the Lord. And indeed, Peter's confession in Luke 5:8, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man," makes more sense if this was originally a post-resurrection story following Peter's denials.

In the ages, many have asked how is it possible that the disciples returned to their everyday activity. Speculation covers the range from the state of the disciples mental condition in the post-Easter environment, a practical need for income and livelihood in the early days of the mission. In the end, all speculation is simply that.

21:6 pull: the Greek *helko* (pull, haul, draw) also refers to the Father drawing people to Jesus (6:44) and Jesus drawing all people to himself (12:32). Now, after the resurrection, it is the disciples who are responsible for doing the drawing or hauling (21:6, 11). However, when the disciples seek to haul in fish on their own, they catch nothing. When they act in response to Jesus' command, their catch is almost more than they can handle.

21:7 tucked in his garment: The word the NIV translates as 'outer garment' (*ependytēs*) is found only here in the NT and may need to be rendered differently in the light of its context. The expression *ēn gar gymnos*, literally rendered would be 'for he was naked/lightly dressed'. Ancient art and literature indicate that cast-net fisherman worked naked, and it is not impossible that Peter, being naked, wrapped not a full 'outer garment' but a simple loincloth around him to show respect for Jesus before jumping into the water to make his way to the shore to meet him. The verb *diazōnnyμι*, translated 'wrapped', can also mean 'hitch up'.

Brown (*John*, The Anchor Bible, 1072) suggests a more logical picture of Peter being clad only in his fisherman's smock (*ependytes*) -- without the normal undergarments -- thus being "poorly dressed" rather than "naked" -- both are meanings of *gymnos*, Peter "tucks it into" his cincture (a more literal meaning *diazōnnyμι* than "put on"), so that he can swim more easily and dives into the water.

21:9,12-13 fish: It is strange that Jesus already has fish since none have yet been brought ashore. This meal may have had eucharistic significance for early Christians since John 21:13 recalls John 6:11 which uses the vocabulary of Jesus' action at the Last Supper.

21:11 the net was not torn: torn (*schizo*). This verb is also used of soldiers not tearing Jesus' robe (19:24). The related noun, *schisma*, is always used in John to refer to divisions among the people (7:43; 9:16; 10:19).

one hundred fifty-three large fish: The exact number 153 is probably meant to have a symbolic meaning in relation to the apostles' universal mission; Jerome claims that Greek zoologists catalogued 153 species of fish. Or 153 is the sum of the numbers from 1 to 17 (the resulting universality of an associated triangle). Others invoke Ezekiel 47:10.

12:12 None . . . dared to ask him: is Jesus' appearance strange to them? Cf Luke 24:16; Mark 16:12; John 20:14. The disciples do, however, recognize Jesus before the breaking of the bread as opposed to Luke 24:35 [Emmaus story].

21:14 the third time Jesus was revealed: This verse connects John 20 and 21. However it should be noted that this is the fourth time Jesus as appeared to the disciples. Possible explanations range from the appearance to Mary was not counted since as a woman she could not serve as a witness, the author did not consider Mary a disciple, or simply the author counted incorrectly.

21:15-17 love: In these three verses there is a remarkable variety of synonyms: two different Greek verbs for love; two verbs for feed/tend; two nouns for sheep; two verbs for know. Regarding the two different words used for "love" in Jesus' questions and Peter's answers.

Jesus: *agapas me* ("Do you love me?")

Peter: *philo se* ("I love you.")

Jesus: *agapas me* ("Do you love me?")

Peter: *philo se* ("I love you.")

Jesus: *phileis me* ("Do you love me?")

Peter: *philo se* ("I love you.")

While there can be differences in meanings of these two words, they can also be synonymous. O'Day (*John*, The New Interpreters Bible, p. 860) indicates how these words are used as synonyms throughout the gospel with no difference in meaning: "For example, both verbs are used to speak of "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (*agapao*, 13:23; *phileo*, 20:2); God's love of Jesus (*agapao*, 10:17; *phileo*, 5:20); God's love for the disciples (*agapao*, 14:23; *phileo*, 16:27); and the disciples' love of Jesus (*agapao*, 14:23; *phileo*, 16:27). There is no reason, therefore, to ascribe gradations of meaning to their usage here. The Evangelist's propensity for synonyms is also evident in the variation "lambs" / "sheep" and "feed" / "tend." "

In addition, Raymond Brown (*John*, Anchor Bible Series, p.1102) notes that Peter answers the first two questions with an unequivocal "Yes" -- or *nai* which can be translated, "Yes, indeed" or "Most certainly." He notes that if a great difference in meaning was intended between *agapao* and *phileo*, Peter's answers would have been, "No, but I am your friend."

21:15-23 The thrice repeated question and answer is commonly interpreted as symbolically undoing the thrice repeated denial of Jesus. One interpretation of Peter's "hurt" after the third question, is that it reminded him of his three denials. This section constitutes Peter's rehabilitation and emphasizes his role in the church.

The threefold confession of Peter is meant to counteract his earlier threefold denial (John 18:17, 25, 27). The First Vatican Council cited these verses in defining that Jesus after his resurrection gave Peter the jurisdiction of supreme shepherd and ruler over the whole flock.

Jesus' threefold command to Peter to tend his lambs and to shepherd his sheep (21:15-17) has ample precedents in the OT, which is pervaded by a yearning for shepherds who are devoted to God, to caring for his sheep, and to carrying out his will (Ezek. 34; Jer. 3:15; cf. Isa. 44:28; see commentary at chap. 10 above). The term "tend" (*boskō*) regularly occurs in the LXX for feeding sheep (e.g., Gen. 29:7; 37:12); the metaphorical sense is found already in Ezek. 34:2.

21:15 more than these: probably "more than these disciples do" rather than "more than you love them" or "more than you love these things [fishing, etc.]."

21:18 when you were younger...: Originally probably a proverb about old age, now used as a figurative reference to the crucifixion of Peter.

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