

**LIFE AFTER JESUS:  
LIFE IN THE GOOD OLD DAYS  
ACTS 1:3; JOHN 21:1-17  
May 5, 2013**

Do you ever find yourself saying, “Back when I was a boy, or I was a girl...”?

Back when I was growing up there was no such thing as a microwave;  
we took the time to cook!

Back in the old days we had three TV network channels and PBS,  
not 301 cable channels of reality shows.

When I was a kid we would ride our bikes for miles and miles,  
and moms didn’t worry about their kids unless it got dark out and we weren’t home.

Back in the good old days, we didn’t have CDs and mp3s.  
We had LPs, and cassettes, and... eight tracks!

Back in the good old days...

When you start saying that, or at least thinking that,  
you’ve crossed over a boundary.

You are officially no longer “young.”

Do you sometimes wish for the good old days?

I’m occasionally reminded of some other aspects of the good old days that were not so good.

Watching the evening news and seeing body counts from Viet Nam,  
campus protests, street riots, significant political assassinations,  
and a lot more racism than we see today.

I consider the blessings I’ve got in my life today that I didn’t have then.

And I realize the good old days may be old,  
but not necessarily good in every aspect.

Shortly after Easter, Jesus’ followers had a brief taste of the good old days.

He was back with them, just like the good old days,  
but somehow even better, resurrected, never to die again.

Sharing meals, teaching about the kingdom, hanging out, working a few healings here and there.

I’m sure it brought back some great memories.

But this time would not be prolonged;  
he was not going to stay with them.

He was preparing them for life after Jesus,  
life when he would no longer be with them in bodily form.

In the first chapter of the book of Acts it says,

“After his suffering, Jesus showed himself to them  
and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive.

He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.” (Ac.1:3)

The Greek term translated “many convincing proofs” was used in ancient rhetoric  
of hard evidence that convinces the skeptic or confirms the authority of the apologist.

Amazingly, some of Jesus’ followers still struggled with doubt,  
and they needed some convincing.

It seems amazing because they knew he’d been crucified and buried.

They knew his grave was empty, and he’d appeared to them.

They knew, in fact, that he’d spent part of forty days with them.

But they still needed convincing.

Before we look down our noses at them...

Consider your own difficulties in believing.  
Oh, I know we've not seen and touched the body of the risen Christ.  
But we have the staggering evidence of 2000 years of church history.  
We have the witness of the New Testament,  
    which Jesus' first followers did not have.  
We know men and women from that first generation  
    willingly gave their lives for their faith.  
It stands to reason they must have been absolutely sure, rock solid certain,  
    that Jesus was exactly who he said he was,  
    that he had really risen from the dead,  
    that they would share in his resurrection.  
After all, who is going to surrender their life for a made up story?  
    For that matter, who's going to give up their life for  
        a "maybe, I'm not really sure" story?  
The folks in that first generation were not taking someone else's word for it.  
    They were not in a position to be led astray.  
    They were eye witnesses.  
    They were in a unique position to know if it was true or not.  
        And for their faith in Jesus they willingly faced death.

We have plenty of archeological evidence,  
    none of it undermining biblical history,  
    much of it affirming that history.

We see the reality of the church,  
    which has grown from a little handful of people in Jesus' day  
    to perhaps two billion people today.

We have all kinds of facts that support  
    the reality of the biblical story and particularly the resurrection of Jesus.  
But we still sometimes struggle and wonder and doubt.  
    Just like Jesus' first followers.

So during those forty days, Jesus gave them many convincing proofs.  
    He showed he was truly risen, alive, and who he said he was.  
    They'd need to be rock-solid sure if they would go out in mission and ministry to the world.  
    It was going to be a lifelong project, difficult, and sometimes quite costly.  
    They needed to be really sure.

He was with them forty days.

Forty.

You've run across some forties in Bible stories.

Forty days or forty years is common biblical code for a time of preparation.

It rained for 40 days and 40 nights in the time of Noah. (Ge.7:17)

God was cleansing the earth of sinfulness and corruption,  
    preparing for a new beginning, a new creation.

When Moses went up on Mt. Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments from God,  
    he was there for 40 days. (Ex.24:12-18)

The Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 40 years before finally entering the Promised Land.(Ex.16:35)

They had to learn to trust and follow God.

When the prophet Elijah was exhausted and feeling defeated,  
    he traveled 40 days and 40 nights

    before arriving at the mountain of God to meet with God. (1Kg.19:8)

Before starting his public ministry, Jesus fasted and prayed in the wilderness for 40 days,

and he was tempted by the devil. (Lk.4:1-13)

It was all in preparation for facing the struggles and temptations he would face in his ministry.

And here, in the opening of the book of Acts,

the followers of Jesus have 40 days of fellowship with and learning from the risen Christ.

All as a time of preparation for the life and ministry that was ahead of them.

The book of Acts does not give us a lot of detail about what Jesus said and did with them during that time.

We'll see a little bit, some of his closing words, next Sunday.

But John's Gospel gives us several interesting episodes of the risen Jesus talking with his followers.

Shortly after Easter, after they'd met the risen Christ,

several of his disciples were back at the Sea of Galilee, fishing.

It seems as if, with Jesus apparently gone, they were going back to the lives they once had.

Back to the good old days.

But Jesus had other ideas.

### **JOHN 21:1-14**

Fishing was what they knew, so fishing was what they'd do.

But it turned into an episode strangely like one they'd experienced during Jesus' ministry. (Lk.5:1-11)

They fished all night and caught nothing.

A stranger on shore encourages them to try again,

just cast on the other side.

"Riiiiight, like there are fish over here but not over there?"

Who is this guy, and where did he come up with this wacky idea?"

But, there was nothing to be lost by trying one more cast of the net.

And they caught so many fish, they almost couldn't handle it!

That was when they realized it had to be Jesus.

On shore, he cooked some fish and fed them breakfast...

fish and a few loaves of bread,

sort of like when he fed the 5000 on a few loaves and fishes. (Jn.6:5-13)

All of this had "the good old days" written all over it.

As you read the story, you're just waiting for him to say,

"I will make you fishers of men."

Well, he didn't say it.

But he did it... first and most explicitly with Peter.

### **JOHN 21:15-17**

This story is the rehabilitation of Peter.

Jesus asked him, "Do you love me?"

Three times!

Why three times?

The first two times Jesus asked, he used the Greek word "agapeo,"

which indicates a selfless love,

a willingness to serve the well-being of another person,

even at great cost to self.

Agapeo is the type of love that drove Jesus to the cross.

Peter, do you agapeo me?

Peter answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

But he used the Greek word "phileo,"

a warm, brotherly love.

But not a love that is willing to sacrifice everything.

So Jesus asked, "Do you agapeo love me?"

And Peter answered, "I phileo love you."

Did you notice the third time Jesus asked, Peter was hurt?

Jesus asked him,

“Peter, do you phileo love me?”

He stepped down from agapeo to phileo,  
meeting Peter where he was.

I wonder if some of Peter’s upset was because he knew Jesus had to step down to meet him.

I wonder, too, if Peter’s hurt came from being reminded of

another time he had been asked three times about his relationship with Jesus.

It was a reminder of the good old days that were not nearly so good.

When Jesus was taken to trial before Annas and Caiaphas, his life at stake,

Peter and John had followed behind,

and stood with some bystanders out by a fire to keep warm, listening to the trial.

While at the fire, three different people asked Peter

if he was one of Jesus’ followers.

Three times he was asked.

Three times he denied knowing Jesus.

Three times.

(Jn.18:15-27)

Now, standing by another fire at the lakeside,

Peter was asked three times about his relationship with Jesus.

Do you love me?

Three times.

He did better at the lakeside.

At least he acknowledged a positive connection with Jesus.

But even then, he was not fully on board.

He couldn’t say he agapeo loved Jesus.

Phileo, brotherly love, yes.

Sacrificial love, no, not yet.

Maybe part of Peter’s hurt was that he still did not love Jesus the way Jesus loved him.

But Jesus met him where he was,

flawed, sinful, not 100% on board,

can’t go from phileo love to agapeo love,

and still Jesus devoted 40 days to training and equipping him,

and then gave him a mission, a ministry.

Feed my lambs, take care of my sheep, feed my sheep.

Wait, Jesus!

You’ve got the wrong guy.

I know you think you’re calling me,

but it’s a wrong number.

I’m not spiritually mature enough.

I don’t love you enough.

I don’t know enough Bible.

I don’t pray enough.

I’m too sinful.

You don’t know the stuff that’s in my head and my heart.

You don’t know the things I’ve done.

Oh, wait, you DO know.

And you gave me a do-over.

After my awful denial of you,

you asked me three times if I love you.

And then you gave me a ministry.  
And eventually Peter even grew to love Jesus with agapeo love.  
He served him faithfully,  
preaching and healing,  
being the rallying point leader for the apostles,  
sitting in a jail cell more than once because of his ministry,  
and eventually even giving his life for Christ.

What excuses do you have for not getting involved in ministry?

Maybe you feel like you've got nothing to contribute to Christ's work.

But the truth is, every believer can do something for the cause of Christ.

Henry Crowell contracted tuberculosis when he was a boy.

Under doctor's orders he worked outdoors for 7 years and regained his health.

As a young man deeply moved by a sermon, Crowell prayed,

"I can't be a preacher, but I can be a good businessman.

God, if you will let me make money,

I will use it in your service."

He then bought a little run-down mill at Ravanna, Ohio.

Within ten years his mill, named Quaker Oats,

was a household word to millions of people.

Henry P. Crowell faithfully gave 60 to 70 percent of his income to God's causes.

And many people were blessed in Jesus' name.

Jesus is in the business of forgiveness, rehabilitation, and equipping his people for service.

Oh, I know many of you might want to settle in for the good old days of the church.

You know, when you thought your job was to pay "the minister,"

someone whose job it was to DO ALL the ministry.

You just come, sit for an hour, put a little something in the plate, listen,

then go to lunch and critique the service.

But Jesus is preparing you, calling you, equipping you,

for a new day.

A day when you devote yourself to something bigger than your next paycheck,  
something of eternal impact.

A day when you make yourself wholly available to God.

A day when you love others enough to serve their needs and speak His name to them.

A day when you love Jesus enough that you can truthfully say,

"Yes, Lord, I agapeo love you."

Back in the good old days, stage coach passengers paid for the rankings of first, second and third class.

You couldn't tell the difference between the three inside the stage coach.

Every person was seated without distinction.

But when the stage came to the hill, the distinctions emerged.

The second-class passengers had to get out and walk.

The first class passengers stayed seated in the coach.

The third-class passengers had to get out and push.

Jesus is ALWAYS third class.

So are those who follow him.

They roll up their sleeves and help push.

Jesus has in mind for you a new day.

I wonder what he has in mind for you to do in his name?