

---

# “After These Things”

A SERMON on John 21:1-19 for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter, Year C  
Preached 1 May 2022 by the Rev. Matthew Emery, Lead Minister  
Cloverdale United Church, Surrey, British Columbia, Canada

It only took a year for William Post, otherwise known simply as ‘Bud’, to be a million dollars in debt. “I wish it never happened,” he said; “it was totally a nightmare.”<sup>1</sup> ‘It,’ in Bud’s case, was winning the lottery, a 16.2-million-dollar jackpot in the Pennsylvania state lottery back in 1988. Back in 1988, that would have had the same purchasing power as a jackpot over twice the size today, almost 40-million-dollars US or about 50-million-dollars Canadian.<sup>2</sup> But in only a year, it was all gone... and Bud was, as I said, a million dollars under water. By 2016, when the financial and business news website *Business Insider* included his tale as part of a larger story, Bud was reported as “living quietly on \$450 a month and food stamps.”

Some people might pass judgment against the money management skills of those who choose to play the lottery in the first place—after all, the odds are definitely *not* ever in your favour—but we don’t know whether buying lottery tickets was a regular thing for Bud or just a one-off. What we *do* know is that Bud’s story had some particularly tragic twists. He was sued by a girlfriend for a share of the winnings, and the girlfriend was successful. Bud’s brother, on the other hand, was thankfully *not* successful at his attempt to have Bud killed by a hired hit man, in the hopes of inheriting some part of the fortune, but rather was arrested. As was Bud himself after a few years, having sunk money into various family businesses, which in turn plunged him into debt and thus sent the bill collectors his way—one of whom Bud fired a gun over the head of.

Someone like Bud may have had some uniquely unfortunate turns of event after his lottery win, but the truth is, stories of lottery winners losing it all abound. According to some reports, about 70 percent of people who win a lottery or get some other massive financial windfall end up broke.<sup>3</sup> And even when people don’t end up completely broke, it’s not uncommon for them to end up back in the same sort of life circumstances they were in before such a win. And it typically only takes a few years.

For Simon Peter and his companions in today’s scripture reading, we don’t know whether it had been a few years or a few weeks or even a few days that had passed. But back in the same sort of life they’d led before is where we find them. Admittedly, John’s gospel doesn’t say that Peter or any of the rest of them had been fishermen, but the other gospel accounts do. Matthew, Mark, and Luke alike have Jesus first calling out to Peter and his brother Andrew while they were engaged in their trade as fishermen. “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people,” Jesus says.<sup>4</sup>

And while John’s gospel doesn’t start out on a sandy beachfront, now—“after these things”... after Peter and the other disciple run to the empty tomb... after Mary Magdalene encounters the risen Jesus in the garden... after Jesus appears to the disciples huddled in a locked

---

<sup>1</sup> The story of William “Bud” Post’s lottery win—and subsequent events in Bud’s life—drawn from Pamela Engel, “21 lottery winners who blew it all,” *BusinessInsider.com*, 6 January 2016, <https://www.businessinsider.com/lottery-winners-who-lost-everything-2016-1>

<sup>2</sup> Calculated using the inflation calculator at <http://www.in2013dollars.com>

<sup>3</sup> A statistic from the National Endowment for Financial Education, cited in Teresa Dixon Murray, “Why do 70 percent of lottery winners end up bankrupt?”, *Cleveland.com* (the website of *The Plain Dealer* newspaper), 14 January 2016, [https://www.cleveland.com/business/2016/01/why\\_do\\_70\\_percent\\_of\\_lottery\\_w.html](https://www.cleveland.com/business/2016/01/why_do_70_percent_of_lottery_w.html)

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 4:19.

room... after Jesus shows himself to Thomas a week later... “after these things”—the sandy beachfront is where we find ourselves, and where we find Peter and four others of the disciples.

There—at the shoreline, on the beachfront, by the seashore—after these things... Peter declares “I am going fishing.”

“We will go with you,” the others say.

As I said, we don’t know how long “after these things” it had been—a day, a week, a year—but however long it had been, Peter and the others had now simply found themselves back in the same sort of life they had left behind. Or so it would seem. Back at the shores of the sea. Back in the fisherman’s boat.

Jesus, though, throughout his life and ministry, had this odd habit of showing up right there *in* the ordinary circumstances of life: in ordinary people’s houses, at ordinary water wells, among ordinary fishermen. And just in the same way that Jesus appeared in that room among his disciples and showed his body to them, the scars showing that he, the resurrected Jesus, was, in fact, the same Jesus they’d known all along... in just that same way, the Jesus who during his life and ministry kept showing up in ordinary places, now in his resurrected life still shows up in ordinary places, too. Like at the lakeshore, where the disciples have simply gone back to fishing.

But you see, my friends, the thing about Jesus is—perhaps you remember this from all the stories from all across his life and ministry—even though Jesus *does* have this habit of showing up in the ordinary places, in the everyday places where we’ve retreated back to, meeting us where we are... *he rarely leaves us there*. He asks us, piercingly, ‘do you want to be healed?’ He bids us pick up our mats and walk. He commands that which is dead within us to be unbound and let go.

The body of the resurrected Jesus bore the same scars that it gained before the tomb: this the disciples saw in that locked room. The habits of the resurrected Jesus continued their way of showing up in the ordinary and everyday moments of life: this, too, they came to know as they sat in their fishermen boats one day. And the *work* of the resurrected Jesus? It carries on doing what Jesus always did, too, refusing to simply leave people where they are. The resurrected Jesus continues—with power—to call people, to command and invite people, to commission and empower people into something new.

That’s what Peter came to find out as he and Jesus sat eating breakfast that morning. The smell of fish still strong on his breath, Jesus offers Peter the opportunity to undo those three denials Peter had made beside the charcoal fire outside Pilate’s headquarters on the night before the crucifixion. And in response to Peter’s threefold affirmation—“Yes, Lord; you know that I love you”—Jesus invites him to live into resurrection: feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep. Peter’s way forward would not be to simply retreat back into an old life. “After these things”—after trial, after death, after resurrection—Peter’s path forward will be to be a part of the work of Jesus still alive in the world, to be a part of feeding and tending, healing and teaching, calling and proclaiming.

For us too: “After these things”—after whatever challenge you’re facing in this moment, after whatever present pressure is consuming your attention, after even the joy and celebration you may be in the midst of this day—after these things, Jesus will still be there once again to meet you, feed you, and moreover call you forward into his ongoing work in the world.

Because, you see, that’s the thing with resurrection. Resurrection isn’t like the lottery. Resurrection isn’t simply a one-time thing, a jackpot that you can expend until you descend right back to where you started. Resurrection keeps unfolding, right where we are, in each new day.