

Sunday, May 10, 2026 Sixth Sunday of Easter Sermon

“Follow Me” Pastor Takaaki Inoue

1 Peter 5:1–7, John 21:15–22

**1 [The circumstances surrounding Peter's appointment as the church's leader]**

Chapter 21 of the Gospel of John was added later. Today, let's first discuss why it was added. After breakfast by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus spoke to Peter, asking, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” (verse 15). “These” refers to the other disciples. This was because Peter had previously said, “Even if everyone else falls away, I will never fall away.” (Mark 14:29). However, just a few hours later, Peter betrayed Jesus and fled, just like the other disciples. It feels as though Jesus' question is saying, “Do you still think you're better than the others? You are just as weak. Have you realized that?” Peter then answers, “Yes, Lord. You know that I love you.” Here we see a Peter who can no longer confidently say, “I love you.” We see a Peter who has come to know not his own love, but the love of Christ. We see a Peter declaring that what he can boast of is no longer his own love, but only the love of Christ. Then Jesus says to him, “Feed my lambs.” This means, “Nurture the believers.” Jesus appointed Peter as a leader of the church. This is why Chapter 21 was added. It was also to reveal that “the disciple whom Jesus loved” was John, to grant apostolic authority to this Gospel, and to place it on equal footing with the other three Synoptic Gospels.

What is necessary for clergy is to know that they, like everyone else, are weak; to know that they are loved by Christ despite this; and to be people who do not boast in their own deeds, but in what Christ has done. Those who know they are fallible do not blame others for their failures, because they recognize that they are no different. The kind of leader Jesus teaches us to be is not a strong leader, but a leader who embraces weakness—a leader who carries wounds. Psychologist Gordon Allport said, “Those who deal with human problems must be able to accept ambiguity.”

● Tolstoy wrote the following folk tale. A sinner died and stood before the gates of heaven. Then a voice called out from within, “Sinners cannot enter heaven.” When the sinner asked, “Who are you?” the reply came, “I am David.” The sinner said, “Did you not commit the grave sins of adultery and murder? Please have mercy on me and open the gate.” At that, David's voice fell silent. Next, a voice came from within: “Sinners cannot enter heaven.” When the sinner asked, “Who are you?” the reply came, “I am Peter.” The sinner said, “Did you not deny the Lord three times, even though you were loved by Jesus? Please have mercy on me and open the gate.” Then Peter's voice fell silent. Finally, a voice came from within: “Sinners cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” When the sinner asked, “Who are you?” the reply came, “I am John.” The sinner said, “Did you not say, ‘Love one another’? You

cannot possibly not love me. Please have mercy on me and open the gate.” Then the gates of heaven opened, and a voice said, “Come, brother.” David, Peter, and John appeared and warmly welcomed the sinner.

If we go to heaven, it will be full of sinners. But no one will judge us there. David and Peter were both people who could not have entered heaven without God’s forgiveness. They will surely welcome us warmly.

## ② **【To care for someone is to share their suffering】**

After this, Jesus asks Peter twice, using the exact same words: “Simon son of John, do you love me?” It is said that He asked this three times because Peter had denied Him three times, but to me, the meaning seems different from the first question. The latter two questions do not include the phrase “more than these.” I feel that the second and third questions are asking about “Peter’s will and resolve.” Peter is a weak man right now. However, I sense that Jesus’ expectation is not for him to remain that way, but rather that—though he is weak now—he should eventually become a strong person who follows Christ. And indeed, he did become such a person.

Jesus told Peter, “Feed my lambs” (verse 15), “Take care of my sheep” (verse 16), and “Feed my sheep” (verse 17). The “sheep” and “lambs” refer to the believers. Since it says “my,” all believers belong to Christ. To love Christ is to love the believers, who are the body of Christ. “Feed” means to nourish, and “Take care” means to look after. We must nourish the souls of believers through preaching and the Lord’s Supper. And we are told to pray for the believers and attend to their various needs. The term “pastor” comes from this. We pastors need to be conscious that we have been entrusted with what belongs to Christ. I found something like this written in a book by Henri Nouwen.

●Let’s consider the meaning of the word “care.” The word “care” derives from the Old High German word \*kara\*, which means “to grieve” or “to feel sorrow.” The true meaning of care is to grieve, to experience sorrow, and to weep together. ...In fact, if we were invited to share someone’s pain before trying to fix it, we would likely feel resistant. We try to escape from painful realities or change the situation as quickly as possible. This is because it is painful for us. However, if we try to save others without loving care, we become dominators and controllers, and true community is never built.

To care for someone means to be by their side and share their suffering, even if you cannot heal them. There are few things in this world for which we have answers. Sometimes, all we can do is cry.

### ③ **【Follow me】**

After this, the Lord said to Peter, “When you were young, you used to tie your own belt and go wherever you wanted. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will tie your belt and take you where you do not want to go.” (verse 18) This signifies that Peter would eventually be bound and led to the place of execution to be martyred. It is said that Peter, feeling it would be a waste to die on the same kind of cross as Jesus, chose to die on an inverted cross. This represents a shift from a style of faith where one “goes where one wants to go” to a style where one “goes where one does not want to go.” It is a transition from a faith that does what one wants to do to a faith that is compelled to do what one does not want to do. When you think about it, Jesus’ life was the same. It was a path leading from performing miracles to becoming powerless, from a time when crowds followed Him to a time when everyone scattered, from glory to the defeat of the cross, and from praise to mockery.

When Peter turned around, he saw John following behind. So Peter asked Jesus, “Lord, what about this man?” Peter knew that he was destined to suffer, so he was concerned about the fate of others. Then the Lord said, “Even if I want this man to live a long life, what is that to you? You must follow me.” Peter and John had different destinies. Peter was martyred, while John was exiled to the island of Patmos, where he lived a long life and died. It is the same for us. Each of us has a different destiny given to us by God. There is no point in comparing ourselves to others. We must strive to fulfill the work God has prepared for us right before our eyes. We must not look to the side or behind us, but look ahead and upward. We must constantly ask Christ, “What should I do? What is my calling?”

●Pastor Yasuro Enomoto writes: “God separated Abraham from his wife, Lot, and his only son Isaac, leaving him alone by God’s own hand. Jacob also encountered God when he was separated from his parents and older brother and slept out in the wilderness. Joseph was separated from his eleven brothers and sold into Egypt all by himself, yet there he saw the glory of God. ...God asks us to stand alone before Him.” “We fear being alone. And we tend to make everyone else the problem. As long as we are making everyone else the problem, we cannot stand on God’s mountain. ...The Lord asked Peter, ‘Follow me.’ It is unsettling and lonely to be the only one obeying the Word. Yet, the Word is something we cannot obey unless we are alone.”

The Word is always spoken directly to you. I want to hear the words, “Follow me,” as if they were spoken directly to me, and continue to follow Him from now on.