



A delightfull readable yet profound survey of the way stories inform our faith and values, and are essential to our Christian witness. Ralph Milton at his best.

[Click here for more information.](#)

## **Feed my Sheep**

**Peter receives his mandate**

**based on various resurrection accounts**

**by Ralph Milton**

*(Note: This story is fictionalized but the main events are based on Mark, though it borrows from all the gospels as well as from Acts 10.)*

Mary and Peter walked down the empty streets of Jerusalem – empty because of the Sabbath – out into the countryside. They walked because there was nothing else to do. They walked the way millions before and since have walked away their emptiness. They had lost the one they loved – one they thought would bring new hope, not just to them, but to the world. Their best friend had died, but more than that, hope had been snuffed out like a cheap candle. And mixed in all of that for Peter, was the guilt. He had betrayed his best friend.

They walked until their legs rebelled. “I think maybe I can sleep now.” said Mary. “I’m so desperately tired. And I need to see my friends.” She gestured toward the village of Bethany where Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived. Peter understood. Mary needed people now to talk with, until the talking softened the pain.

Peter needed to work. “I might as well go back fishing,” said Peter. “There’s nothing else to do.” Without another word he began the long walk north to Capernaum in Galilee. He followed the road along the Jordan, dozing fitfully in the shade of trees along its banks, refusing to speak to any travelers along the way, stumbling toward whatever might be left of what he once called home.

His wife, his children, his extended family were glad to see this haggard, familiar stranger back among them, even though he had abandoned them some months before; even though he spoke little if at all to anyone. He pushed aside the hot spiced wine his mother made to help him sleep, and walked instead toward the lake called Galilee and groaned his dusty, unused boat down off the sand toward the water. Sitting on a rock not far away he saw some friends who, like him had followed Jesus to Jerusalem. Like Peter, they could think of nothing else to do but fish. Peter motioned to them. Wordlessly, they forced the heavy boat into the lake.

They fished all night. They caught absolutely nothing, and that seemed somehow right. The emptiness of their boat was like the emptiness of their hearts. They had gone to Jerusalem with Jesus and came back empty. It was right they should go fishing and come back empty.

With precision honed in years of practice, they rowed toward the shore at dawn. There in the half-light of morning, a stranger stood on the beach. “Children,” he called. “Did you catch anything?”

“Ha!” sneered Peter.

“Then try something different. It is a new morning – a new day. Cast your nets on the other side of the boat.”

Peter hesitated. His professional judgment and the anger in his heart found reason enough to reject, out of hand, this suggestion from a stranger. But stronger than those instincts were the ones based on kindness and politeness, so Peter threw the net out to the other side and hauled it in.

“Holy smokes!” he yelled and in that instant, the enthusiastic fisher in Peter won out over the disillusioned disciple. “All them fish will sink the boat! The net is full! Look out!” This felt familiar. This strained his muscles. This felt good.

“Peter,” said one of his friends. “It is the Lord. Look, Peter.”

Peter looked. If he had been confused before, he was utterly dumfounded now. And in the years to come, he confused his listeners and himself as he told the story of how he jumped into the water, how Jesus sat and ate with them on the beach. And when he tried to explain things, nothing made any sense to him or anyone else.

But Peter remembered one thing with absolute clarity – how Jesus ate with them there on the beach, and how he asked Peter, “Do you love me?”

Peter could barely whisper. “Yes. Oh yes.”

“Then Peter. Feed my sheep.”

He asked the question three times, until the mandate burned into the centre of his being. “Feed my sheep!”

“We are witnesses to all that Jesus did,” Peter said later. He found himself traveling all over the country telling his confusing, senseless, contradictory, wonderful story.

“We saw all that Jesus did in Judea and Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him up on the third day. The women, Mary of Magdala and Mary his mother and Salome were the first witnesses. They saw the empty tomb, then came to tell us that Jesus was alive to fill our lives with hope. He is the one our people have been waiting for. He is the Messiah, the Holy One of God.

“He came that we might have life – life in all its fullness.”

**Ralph Milton has written a number of books,  
all of them available through Wood Lake Publishing.**

**[Click here to see them all.](#)**