

Forgiven & Restored

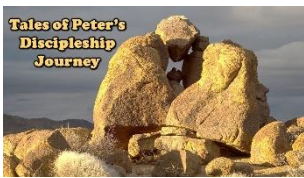


<John 21:1-19>

1 After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. 2 Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. 3 Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. 4 Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." 6 He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. 7 That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. 8 But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

9 When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. 10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." 11 So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. 14 This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

*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." Jesus said to him, "**Feed my lambs.**" 16 A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "**Tend my sheep.**" 17 He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the 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.**" 18 Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." 19 (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."*



In this sermon we are looking at the stories of the disciple Simon, who was known by the end of Jesus' ministry as Peter. Next week we will look at how he got that name. I like Peter, because the gospel stories, portray him in all his weakness, and I find that he is easy to identify with. How does Peter's discipleship story speak to us today?

This is the fourth sermon in this series. We started with the story of Peter fishing and leaving his nets to follow Jesus. Then, we had the story of Peter walking on the water and having to be rescued. Last week we heard how Peter denied knowing Jesus on the eve of Jesus' crucifixion. *Find previous sermons here: methodistic.org.uk.*



Today's topic is **Forgiven & Restored** as we look at Jesus' grace-filled response to Peter after the resurrection. I am going to divide the scripture that we heard into three segments and comment about each. First will be the disciples in the boat fishing and the miraculous catch of fish

(John 21:1-8); then, breakfast on the beach with Jesus (John 21:9-14); finally, Jesus' conversation with Peter (John 21:15-19).



FIRST. The Fishing Trip.

The other gospel appearances of Jesus to the disciples after the resurrection are all in Jerusalem when they are behind locked doors. But now some time has passed. They cannot remain there forever. They are back in the north by Lake Galilee, or at least John tells us that seven of the disciples are there. Jesus was dead, and they had seen him raised a couple of times, but now what should they do? They had staked everything on Jesus and now they were hurt and directionless.

What do you do when you feel decentred, adrift or at-sea? What do you do when experiences overwhelm your spirit? What are you doing at the moment? I want to suggest that we take comfort, almost mindlessly sometimes, in a variety of familiar activities. Perhaps it is gardening or cooking, or comfort eating or online shopping, or watching TV or scrolling through Facebook, or even *sadly* for some alcohol or drugs. I think we also look for structure and routine.



The seven disciples appear to have taken comfort in their familiar routines. They went back to what they knew: fishing. It was Peter's suggestion to go fishing and the others willingly accompanied him. Were they looking for structure and something to occupy them? Were they running away from their troubles? Were they responding to the practical obligations of being back home? Whatever the reason, **Jesus appears in the middle of their ordinary activities.**

He meets them where they are physically, emotionally and spiritually. He tells them where to find the fish pointing them to bounty and fullness and thriving, and not just surviving. **It is an instance of grace with no strings attached.** They haul in their catch, before they recognize that it is Jesus calling to them. They do not earn it by first declaring him as Lord.

As the net fills with fish, the Beloved Disciple, *we think that is John*, recognizes Jesus. ***It's the Lord!*** he declares. *If you remember back a few weeks to when we started this series, the gospel of Luke describes Jesus calling to Peter, James and John after a night of unsuccessful fishing to go out to the deep water and cast their nets, and they haul in a miraculous catch.* Did John remember back to that occasion? Or was he just more attuned to Jesus' plans and what was happening? Jesus does not show up to us wearing a name tag. **The disciples had to help each other see what they might otherwise have missed.**

We are in good company when we do not recognize Jesus. But when we do discern God's presence, we need to point it out to others who may not quite have grasped it. And we need to listen to those who are trying to point out Christ to us. *Where have you seen Jesus in these last 9 weeks? Who can you tell?*

Peter's understanding was slower, John had to tell him, *It's the Lord*, but when that understanding came, then once again Peter jumped straight into action. Stopping only to grab his outer clothes he leaps into the water and wades or swims 300 feet to shore. *Fishermen in those days either fished wearing no clothes, or just a loin cloth.* He left the others in the boat to do the hard work of bringing the net full of fish to the shore! I'm honestly not sure if we should be mimicking Peter at this point, but I love his enthusiasm, his willingness to get wet, his keenness to be with Jesus, his love for Jesus, even if he was still feeling a bit guilty.



SECOND. Breakfast on the Beach.

So, the disciples get to the beach and pull the nets in discovering that they have 153 fish and the net has not been torn. Why the exact number of 153 fish? There's plenty of theories and speculation, but no definite answer! It was a large amount of fish for a single catch, perhaps representing all the people of the earth. Among the fish would have been the good and the bad. Nothing was weeded out. **That divine grace is offered to all of us.**

Now Jesus is on the shore with a charcoal fire. The last time we heard about Peter and a charcoal fire was when he denied knowing Jesus three times on the night Jesus was arrested, and now he is with Jesus around another charcoal fire. His betrayal must have been on his mind.

Jesus cooks some of their fish and serves some bread with it, and they eat together. The fish and bread remind us of another miracle, the feeding of the 5000. And breaking bread together of course reminds us of the Last Supper.

We are not told about their conversation, but they do not seem to have the courage to ask Jesus anything. Jesus seems to behave normally, while the disciples are speechless in their uncertainty. **For many of us, this is the way God shows up — not in lightning-filled explosions of clarity and wonder, but in awkward moments of inexplicable holiness.**



THIRD. Jesus' Conversation with Peter.

Breakfast was finished. And it was time for Peter and Jesus to talk about the elephant in the room. Jesus tackles it head-on. Three times he asks Peter, *do you love me?* The three times mirror the three times Peter denied Jesus. Jesus is questioning Peter's allegiance, commitment, and love. Peter doesn't wriggle out of it and come up with excuses, and it hurts him when he is asked three times, but he answers positively, "Yes, I love you."

Jesus tasks Peter with demonstrating his love by feeding and tending Jesus' sheep and lambs. ***Feed my Lambs. Tend my Sheep. Feed my Sheep.*** This intense examination was a means of penance and reconciliation. It forced Peter to deal with his denial of Jesus. By asking these questions, Jesus is both confronting Peter and reaffirming his call upon Peter. *A call that we will hear more about next week .*

Failure humbles us but it also teaches us. Yes, our sins will be forgiven. but there is power in asking for that forgiveness, in the process of confession that leads to authentic reconciliation. Peter was restored to Jesus through their conversation. And the right response to that was action. To feed **and tend** Jesus' sheep. Which can mean literally making sure people have enough to eat and have other resources. But it also means caring for them spiritually and mentally. *All those phone calls that you have making over the past 9 weeks to check in each other are a means of tending the sheep. I know because word is getting back to me about just how much those calls mean to you.*

In two weeks' time, we will hear more about Peter and the apostle that he went on to become. Peter has an incredible story of faith. Forgiveness is powerful. It transforms us. It gives us the power and motivation to continue. *[Next week we will hear about how Peter got his name.]* That forgiveness that Jesus offered Peter is there for us too, we only have to ask and yes maybe have an awkward prayer conversation with Christ.

Part of tending the flock though is to extend that forgiveness and restoration to others. Our culture is not very forgiving. We like to shine the spotlight on two things. On success and on failure. More often than not, it is bad news that sells newspapers and attracts viewing audiences. Social media has taken this to whole new level. Our society's obsession with failure combined with publicity



through social media means our worst moments can be subject to intense **public shaming** with or without all the facts. Teenagers, especially, often do stupid things. And the gossip goes around their set of friends. But when reputations get ruined and the whole town knows, it can be enough to drive people to suicide. There is even a term for it: **cyber bullying**.



I want to share this modern-day example of surviving our worst mistakes. It is from the USA. Monica Lewinsky had an affair with President Clinton, when she was a 23 year-old white house intern, which became public knowledge in 1998. Five years ago, when she was in her early 40's, she gave a TED talk (an inspirational talk) called "The Price of Shame."¹ I am

by no means condoning her actions, and nor does she, and she admits it was the worst mistake of her life. In her talk she explained how all the finger-pointing, the public shaming and humiliation affected her. Her parents had her on a suicide-watch for a long time.

At the time of her talk, for 17 years she had endured the comments, which had decreased in number over the years. But the comments on the TED page after the release of her talk were bad, and the moderators on the page kept deleting the worst of them and boosting the positive comments. Eventually the tide turned and the flood of vitriolic comments dried up to a trickle; and as the tone changed and a different set of voices started to speak up.²

Perhaps we can think of that moment of sea change like a sort of herd immunity. The positive voices, when there are enough of them, keep abusive ones from spreading, just as a mostly vaccinated population protects those few people who are not. Together, we have the power to protect the most vulnerable among us. Monica asks us to be "upstanders," to speak up and stand up for those who are victims of our culture of shame. No one deserves a scarlet letter, and when we make people pay a public price for their private actions, we are demonstrating a radical failure of empathy. When we speak up, with something as simple as a supportive Facebook comment, we make it clear that our culture is not a space for public shame and humiliation.



Jesus forgave and restored Peter. Each one of you is a beloved child of God. You are loved. And you are forgiven. Extend that empathy to others. **Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep.**

For the witness of Peter, his failures and his successes.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

Resources

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Jarvis, Cynthia A. and E. Elizabeth Johnson, Eds. *Feasting on the Gospels*. John, Volume 2. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015.

¹ "Monica Lewinsky: The Price of Shame" and transcript (March 2015)

http://www.ted.com/talks/monica_lewinsky_the_price_of_shame

http://www.ted.com/talks/monica_lewinsky_the_price_of_shame/transcript?language=en

² Nadia Goodman, "Want to Prevent Online Bullying? Comment on Facebook" in *Ideas.Ted.Com Blog* (March 27, 2015) <http://ideas.ted.com/want-to-help-prevent-online-bullying-comment-on-facebook/>