



Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?"

"No," they answered.

He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead (John 21:1-14).

It was an early morning on the North Shore of the Sea of Galilee. A light haze of fog hung over the water making it hard to see much further than 100 yards out. The resurrected Jesus, whom just eight days earlier lay dead in a sealed tomb, was now preparing a charcoal fire on the beach. After placing some fish and bread over the fire, Jesus calls out to Peter and several of the disciples who were with him, "Hey friends, catch anything?" As a fisherman myself, I hate that question, especially when I'm not catching any fish! Because of the early morning haze, the

disciples have no idea it's Jesus. So, the guys on the boat reply, "Ummm, well, not very good. We've caught nothing." All night long they've been fishing; it's daybreak and it's about time to call it a day. Man, I've been there. I know exactly how they felt. It's frustrating and embarrassing to fish all day and catch nothing. You're just ready to go home.

Jesus says, "Hey, why don't you throw your net on the right side of the boat and you'll find some." In case you didn't know this, fishermen are some of the most prideful people you will ever meet. We hate taking fishing advice from others, especially from people who are not fishermen! It was a miracle that they even listened to this stranger, but that's just how tired and frustrated they were. In desperation, they throw the net over the right side of the boat and as they began to retrieve it suddenly, the boat leans hard over to the right side and begins taking in water. Peter yells out to the others in the boat, "get over here and help me haul it in." But, they couldn't because of the large number of fish. Now, if you're ever on a fishing boat and something like this happens, it becomes chaotic real quick. Adrenaline kicks in, everyone's running around trying to help; it's crazy.

Suddenly, in the midst of the chaos, something clicks to the Apostle John. Three years previously this same thing happened to him. Peter, James and John were all fishing and catching nothing, when a popular young rabbi named Jesus joined them on the boat and encouraged them to let their nets down into deeper water. And just like this early morning, they caught so many fish their nets began to break and the boats began to sink. On that day, afterward on the beach, Jesus told them, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people, come follow me." Simon Peter and John left everything and followed Jesus. And on this day, John immediately turns to Peter and says, "It is the Lord!"

### **Peter's Response in the Boat**

I love what happens next, because this is exactly what we expect Peter to do. Peter was a guy who leads from his heart. He's an intense and emotional person. For eight long days he's been wallowing in his own prison of shame, discouragement and failure. And the one person he's betrayed, the one person who can do anything about his emotional state, is standing only 100 yards away. Peter wraps his clothes around him—I guess he was in his undies—jumps into the water and swims ashore, leaving the other disciples to manage without him. Don't you just love

it when people with a spiritual experience leave you to clean up the dishes?

You know what's interesting? Peter had seen the resurrected Jesus before. Why didn't Peter have this experience the first time he saw him? Why didn't he run to Jesus then? Why now? Ultimately though, Peter's response mirrors the way we deal with our shame. I don't think any of us would run to Jesus for forgiveness after the massive failure Peter had. Our natural and first response to shame is to hide it, bury it and ignore it by going back home and going fishing. But Jesus works on our shame by showing up over and over again. Peter needed forgiveness and the resurrection will give it to him. Let's get back to the story...

### **An Unusual Breakfast with Jesus**

Jesus not only shows up, but he invites them all to have breakfast with him. I love breakfast. I love me some Millbrae Pancake House! This was actually the first Easter brunch, but I doubt they had mimosas! It would be easy to gloss over their meal, but I think it's deeply significant and even spiritual. By providing a net full of fish and a warm meal, Jesus reminds us that He knows our needs. And He always goes ahead of us and provides for us. Not only that, I think God simply enjoys seeing people fed. God loves to feed people physically, emotionally, socially, intellectually, and spiritually. That's the entire purpose of the church. We are a community of followers of Jesus getting fed by Him so that we can feed others.

Peter wasn't alone eating with Jesus either. Doubting Thomas, Nathanael, James and John, and two others came, all young men in their 20's; quietly eating and staring at the resurrected Jesus. No doubt they were thinking, "OMG, Jesus is alive and He truly lives." I bet they couldn't help stare at His nail-pierced hands. Amazed by the grace they received in the form of a miraculous catch of fish, they came to Jesus, tired, hungry, and were fed. Some of you came hungry today, spiritually hungry and longing for a satisfying meal. The resurrected Jesus wants to feed you today. He's the Bread of Life and Living Water.

### **The Backstory: Peter's Failure**

This week, a question dawned on me: What was Peter and the others doing fishing? I know that Jesus told them he'd meet them back in Galilee, so maybe they are just being obedient. Maybe they were hungry. Maybe they were bored. Maybe they just wanted to fish. I think it's deeper. I think they were returning to their old way of life. So, they go back to what they knew. They go back to fishing. Why would they do that? Well, why do **you** do that? Peter was ashamed. I'm sure he's thrilled that Jesus is alive, but what does that have to do with him now? How could Jesus ever use him again after all he's done? Peter is certain he's been disqualified from being a disciple. He figures, it's all over for him. So, he goes back to fishing. What other options did he have?

At this point, it's important to remember the backstory about Peter's failure. After the last supper, Jesus took the disciples to the Mount of Olives and told his disciples that they'd all fall away from him. But, Peter declared, "I will never fall away! I will never disown you Jesus! If all others fall away, I won't!" But, only a few hours later, around a charcoal fire, as Jesus was standing before the high priest, being mocked, punched, spit on and blindfolded, Peter denied knowing his Lord three times. And the rooster crowed. And he broke down and wept.

What was Peter's problem? What is our problem? It wasn't insincerity. Peter meant exactly what he said that night. His problem was pride. It was innocent enough. Peter was ignorant of what he was really made of and what it would take to follow Jesus. So be careful, never say, "I will never....fill in the blank." Because at our weakest most vulnerable moments, under enough pressure, you and I are capable of doing almost anything. And if you don't think so, you already are farther down the road of pride than you think.

Thankfully, this story doesn't end with bitter tears. The good news about the life of Simon Peter is it demonstrates that failure is never fatal. Failure is never final. Far from being the end, failure can be the raw material for a whole new way of living. And that's only because of what we celebrate today. Easter is what can turn our failure into our greatest reason for joy. On Easter morning, the angel says something to some women who'd come to visit the Jesus' tomb. They wanted to anoint his body according to custom. But instead of finding his body, they found an angel. Do you know what he said to them,

**"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you'" (Mark 16:6-7).**

Did you catch those words: "But go, tell his disciples..." What did he say next? "and Peter."

The women at the tomb didn't catch the significance of those words. And when they got back and told the disciples what the angel said, I don't think even the disciples understood the significance of those two words either. But I believe those two words sent shock waves down one man's spine, and that was Peter. I can just see Peter staring intently into the eyes of those women and saying, "Wait a minute! Did I hear you right? Did he really mention my name? Are you sure? He said, 'Peter'? He really said 'Peter?'" Peter needed forgiveness and restoration. And that's exactly what the resurrection provides. Look with me at the rest of the story in John 21:15-19.

## The Plot: Jesus Restores Peter

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

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

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

## Do You Love Me?

After breakfast, Jesus and Peter take a walk down the beach. We find out later that John was following them close behind. On this walk, Jesus asks Peter a devastating question, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" This is a moment in time that will transform Peter's life. Maybe Easter 2017 will be that moment for you. What is the question that Jesus might ask you today that would cut right down to your very soul? Maybe a question like:

- Do you really think that relationship will fill your loneliness?
- Is the promotion at work really worth the price your family will have to pay?
- When are you going to tell someone about your secret?
- Are you finally done living your life without me?

Think about your worst failure. Think about the one thing that instantly makes you feel shame. That's how Peter was feeling. On this walk, Jesus, with both grace and truth, confronts Peter and speaks right into his failure. Jesus doesn't tiptoe around the issue. He's not angry either. He lovingly confronts Peter. And today, Jesus wants to do the same to you. Jesus will keep coming to you and asking you those hard questions, questions that need to be answered, not because he wants to hurt you, but because he loves you and wants to heal you.

"Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" It's interesting to me that Jesus uses Peter's old name. Remember, Jesus

had renamed him Peter, which meant rock. Now he's calling Peter by his given name as if to emphasize his old way of life. Do you love me more than these? Do you love me more than your life as a commercial fisherman? Do you love me more than you love the other disciples? Do you love me more than they claim to love me? Jesus is probing Peter's heart, forcing him to think about and examine his own motives. Three times Jesus asks Peter, Do you love me? emphasizing and connecting to Peter's threefold denial of Jesus. Peter was hurt because of that. Despite all his failures, Peter in turn says, "I love you, you of all people, know that I love you."

In Peter's response, he's really asking, "Jesus, can you still use me?" In Peter's mind he's blown it. He's failed. What's left for him is a life of fishing. And like Peter, many of us live with a lingering wound that has left us hesitant about coming to church, unsure if Jesus really loves us, bitter and afraid. But what this story teaches us is the resurrection of Jesus forgives our past and restores our future. Whatever wounds you have, bring it to Jesus! Don't let anything hold you back this Easter. Jesus died for you and now lives for you! Jesus knows your whole story and all the ways you have and will deny him and yet loves you anyway! That is the power of Easter! It's more than an event, it's a person.

A major question hangs over this scene: What will Jesus do with Peter now? In response to that question, Jesus gives Peter two powerful words, words he's heard before: "Follow Me." With these words, Jesus says Peter can start again. Despite Peter's past, Jesus invites him to have a fresh start and a new life. He restores Peter's past, littered with broken promises and failed devotion. These two words announce grace to Peter. Peter, who failed, is not a failure. His past is in the past because of the resurrected Jesus. Follow Me is the challenge Easter presents to every one of us here today. But, what does it mean to truly follow Jesus?

For those of you who are not yet followers of Jesus, the resurrection is an invitation to follow Him personally. John 3:16 says, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."* God the Father loved you so much that he sent his one and only Son to die in your place and for your sins. Love sent Jesus to the cross. Love, not nails, held Jesus on the cross. Love brought Jesus out of the grave. Love gives you new life now. Love wins because love has a name—Jesus.

Following Jesus is not about becoming more religious or a better person. Following Jesus means you give your entire heart, mind, and soul to him. It means embracing the suffering of the cross and the victory of the resurrection. Following Jesus means loving him as he is, not as you wish him to be. Do you love Jesus? Then follow him, he'll give you a fresh start today! If you want to know more about what it means to follow Jesus, then you are invited

to our prayer tent, where one of our team members would love to talk with you more about that. If you don't have a Bible, we'll give you one and pray with you. Also, keep coming back to church. Don't wait until Christmas! If you can commit to coming to church consistently, I believe God will do some amazing things in your life.

For those of you who are new Christians, Peter's story is a powerful reminder that you will fail! You will deny Jesus. But, because of the resurrection, you have the power to get back up after a fall and continue to follow Him. Like Peter, Jesus continues to invite you to follow Him. The church is not a gathering of perfect people doing great things. No! The church is a gathering of forgiven sinners, who out of their love for Jesus, serve Him and follow Him. I want to encourage you to join our Love Does community experience starting next Sunday afternoon. For four consecutive Sundays, you'll be challenged and encouraged to follow Jesus along with a group of others who want to do the same.

The study will end with a day to serve our community with the love of Jesus and with no strings attached. I promise you, if you commit to this short term experience, you will grow and experience God in a fresh new way.

And for those of you who have been Christians for a long time, do you still love Jesus the way you first loved Him? Are you still excited about your relationship with Him? Do you still have a deep passion for following Him? If so, then like Peter, Jesus challenges you to feed and take care of the sheep. Who are you investing your life into?

For all of us Jesus asks: Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? Then follow me.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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