

A New Beginning

Text: John 21: 15-19 (Readings: Luke 22: 54-62; John 21:1-19)

Have you ever felt like you let someone down?

A spouse, a friend, a boss, a team mate?

I can sure relate to this idea...I know that I have let people down.

I know that I have disappointed people close to me.

I know that I have let down people who were depending on me.

And it is not the best feeling in the world is it?

Especially when you have boasted about how they could depend on you without a shadow of a doubt.

You said you could be trusted...that you wouldn't let them down...but you did.

Now to disappoint someone who loves you...that hurts.

But to disappoint the one who laid down his life for you...that's painful.

Peter's life was full of ups and downs.

After boasting he would never leave Jesus...

Peter watched from a distance as they led him away.

Peter followed at a distance...

close enough to see Jesus...but not close enough to be seen with Jesus.

As Jesus is being tried by the Kangaroo court of the High Priest, Peter stood outside and chose to warm himself by the fire.

Three times he was recognized, three chances to make a bold stand for his Lord,

And three times he blew it.

And when the rooster crowed, we read, that Peter wept bitterly.

He had failed his friend and Lord...he was an utter failure...after his boasting words.

The Peter gets the news that the tomb was empty and Jesus was alive.

I wonder what is going through Peter's mind.

Imagine how he must have felt.

He was glad Jesus was alive...but what would their relationship be?

Did Peter go too far away to return?

Perhaps you can put yourself in Peter's place this morning.

You have sinned and went away from God and you wonder...

Can God still love me after all that I've done?

Is there still a place and purpose for me in his kingdom.

Here in our passage Jesus again appears to his disciples and now confronts Peter with a fireside chat.

Set the scene

Peter and other disciples go back to what they do best...fishing

Fishing all night...caught nothing.

Jesus stands on the shore and calls for them to try again on the other side of the boat.

When they did...huge haul...unable to pull the net in.

Now notice the similarities here between Peter's first calling to follow Jesus and this account.

Both occurred on the Sea of Galilee,

both times Peter couldn't catch a thing,

both times Jesus told him to throw his nets into the water

and both times there is a miraculous catch.

Sometimes when you have fallen, it's good to go back to where it all began.

When a couple is having difficulty in their marriage they often return to where they spent their honeymoon to remind them of what they had and to act as a starting point once more.

Here Jesus is going to offer Peter another starting point, a second chance to make things right.
It is a time of new beginnings for Peter.

So after a meal together, Jesus turns to Peter.
And in full view of all the other disciples, Jesus confronts Peter.

Peter was full of doubts concerning where he now stood with Jesus.

I suspect he feared the day when Christ might say something like, "Peter, why did you deny Me?"
Jesus could have said, 'You know Peter, you blew it big time with those three denials. All that big talk and boasting...but no action.'

Yet our Lord had too much compassion to push the knife of guilt any deeper into Peter's heart.

Rather, His goal was to remove Peter's guilt, to perform deep soul-surgery and effectively cut out the ache from Peter's heart.

The goal was to restore that broken relationship with Peter.

So in verse 15 Jesus said, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?'

Notice he doesn't call him Simon Peter...the name John uses for him in his gospel.
Peter meaning 'rock'
Jesus doesn't call him 'Simon the rock' ...instead, 'Simon, son of John'.

When Peter made his wonderful confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God'
Jesus had changed his name to Peter...the solid rock.
Since then the rock has crumbled to dust.
The self-confident Peter of John 13 is gone...and only Simon, son of John is left.
We too get to the point where there is nothing left.

Simon, son of John has probably been trying to stuff the memory of his failure in a back closet.
Cover it up, forget the past and move on, ignore what can't be undone.
Go back fishing with the boys.

One of the biggest mistakes we can make is to think we can stuff a skeleton in our closet and forget about it long enough and it will go away.
We try to keep going...hoping things will get back to normal.
But, unfortunately that is not the reality of life.

Wounds of the past...emotional, physical or spiritual have to be dealt with.
They will become infected, or at least leave permanent scarring.

Jesus knows this truth too well...and so he works to bring closure of this sordid affair in Peter's life.
He wants to bring healing to Peter...
To remove the regret, guilt and alienation.

It wasn't that Jesus was forcing Simon to do a certain amount of penance to get forgiveness.
It wasn't that he needed to grovel for a period of time before Jesus would accept him.
Simon wasn't working for forgiveness...
That work had already been done.
Jesus had done that on the cross.

God had already forgiven Simon.
Simon needed to understand this.
Simon needed to forgive Simon.

What was happening on the beach in this account was for Simon's sake.
And so Jesus asks him the question, 'Do you love me more than these?'

That is the most important question.

That's what Jesus is interested in... how much do you love him?
When you love Jesus it is far easier than to do the hard things that Christians are required to do.
It is when we love Jesus that we keep his commandments.

When Jesus says 'These' what is he referring to?

Is he pointing to the other disciples? (the Greek used is neutral term)
Is he pointing at the fish and the money they would bring Peter at the market?
Is he pointing to the village and lake, the home and extended family and closest friends?
Is he referring to Peter's love compared with the other disciples?

The Bible does not tell us exactly which one Jesus meant, or if he meant them all.

Part of the reason is that Jesus is asking us the same question today.
He is asking, 'Do you love me more than these?'
Do you love him more than the things in your life you dare not lose.
Is it your career, your dream, a person, our money, our demand to live life as we please, our tongues
Jesus asks...do you love him more than these?

Peter responds, 'Yes Lord, you know that I love you.'

Instead of asking Peter why he denied Jesus...he says, 'Feed my lambs.'
Jesus is not talking about animals...but people.
He says...Peter I've got a plan for your life...I want you to take care of people who are
young believers.

Then Jesus asks a second time if Peter loved him.

Does he love because Jesus has given him a job to do...again in the limelight, in leadership
Or does he love Jesus?
You see Peter was getting a new beginning...and Jesus was checking if his priorities are in order.
Again, Peter responds, 'Yes lord, you know I love you.'

With this second declaration comes a further responsibility for ministry, 'Take care of my sheep.'

When the lambs grow...don't abandon them.
Be faithful in your calling...this is not a short term service...but a lifelong commitment.

Then Jesus asks a third time...

'Simon, son of John, do you love me?'
This third time was a little too much for Peter...it hurt for Jesus to ask again.
It is as though Jesus has hit a raw nerve...and his tough exterior gives way.
This is a flash back to that night when three times he denies knowing Jesus.
On that night he wasn't asked if he loved Jesus...
just he simple question...do you know him?
Back then his chicken hearted answer was 'Absolutely not!'

Jesus presents him with the third opportunity to boldly cross out those three earlier denials.

Peter needed a new beginning and here was that opportunity.
Though it hurt, Peter was still able to say, Lord you know all things; you know that I love you.

Jesus gave him a third ministry assignment “feed my sheep”.
Jesus was letting Peter know there would be no end to the call of discipleship upon his life.

As the sheep aged, Peter was to age in service to them providing them with the teachings and word of God.

Jesus also revealed to Peter that not only did he have a plan for his life,
he even had planned the way in which Peter would die many years later.
You see if Jesus did not know of our ending, how could we fully trust Him with our present.

The most important question we will have to answer again and again is, “do you love me, more than these?”

Peter was honest with Jesus...
and Jesus responds with honesty about the type of death that Peter would face.

So the question remains for us...
Jim, John, Mark, Margaret, Mary, do you love me more than these?

In Greek there are three different words for love...eros, philia, agape
And two of them are used in this interchange between Jesus and Peter.
Much has been made of the meanings of the ‘love’ words...but there are also overlap.

So we shouldn’t make too much of a distinction between the words that Jesus used and the word that Peter used.

What we can say is love shares itself
It is said that love isn’t love till you give it away.
Love gives of itself and shares itself freely with others...what ever term of love you use.

True love has no strings attached and loves whether you love back or not.
This is the way God loves us and the way we also must love others.
Christ loved us and gave His life for us.
The only way we can even begin to repay this debt of love is by loving others in turn.

Love explains why Christ died.
His love for us caused Him to seek a solution to the problem of sin and give us eternal life.
God loves us because of who He is rather than because of who we are.
He offers to be our God **not** because we are lovable, but because He is love.
He offers to care for us not because of our goodness,
or even because of our effort or good intentions.
He loves us because that is the kind of God He is.
Christ wants us to also demonstrate that love...that’s grace.

Conclusion

We can all look back and see those moments in our lives when we have let someone down.
At those times we need to make amends, fix the problem, talk it through, pray over it.

We can also look and see times when we have let God down.
We have sinned, failed to meet his perfect standard.
But you can’t continue to carry the burden of that failure.

Jesus gently restores a repentant Peter.
Jesus will gently restore a repentant you.

The Lord's Supper that we celebrate today is a reminder that we are forgiven.
Confess and know the forgiveness that is yours.

For you and me there are new beginnings available everyday in our relationship with God.
God has a way of restoring us when we fail him.
God never says... 'You idiot! How could you do such a stupid thing!'

God's desire is for us to walk anew with him.
When we fall we can get up again...because God is there to help us up.
God can turn our mistakes into opportunities for him.

Whatever the mistakes of the past, deliberate or impulsive, shallow or serious,
They were all forgiven by Jesus
And the one who is truly repentant will be restored.
Jesus forgave the fast-talking betrayer and takes him back into the group.
And he gives him responsibility.
He again trusts someone who has failed him, been unreliable.
The forgiveness was full and complete...the record wiped clean.

Jesus had not finished with Peter...and will continue to shape him...
But he calls Peter to follow him.

"once bitten, twice shy" we say.
She failed me that time, never again!
He turned his back on me when I needed him...
I'm going to give him the cold shoulder in return...he deserves it.
And here stands Jesus...fully aware of how unreliable we are, how guaranteed to stuff up
somewhere along the line...but he stands beside us.

We can relate to Simon Peter, son of John...we identify with him.
We too worship God: sing the songs, read the Scripture, pray the prayers.
We too are very aware of our imperfect love for God.
Those times when God has been shoved out of the picture
Those opportunities we had to tell others of our faith in God, but kept quite.
Those times when our faith and morals demanded a certain action...
But we go quietly with the crowd.

All we can awkwardly do is come to God and say...
'Lord you know all these things...and you know I love you.
And the great news of God is that he never says 'Too bad! You've let me down once too many
times and I can't trust you any more.
Instead he says, 'Feed my lambs, take care of my sheep, feed my sheep.'

Jesus is Lord and Master of the second chance,
and the third and the seventh and the seventy-times-seven.
Always a new beginning...always an open door to the throne of our Saviour.
Be assured of forgiveness and a fresh start for all who come to Jesus.

This morning the words of Jesus come to us:
My brother, my sister, do you truly love me?
Feed my sheep.