

You Have Been Reinstated Easter, 2020

There are three scenes after the resurrection in the Gospel of John. The first is the one we began our service with--Jesus appearing to Mary.

Mary represents all of those whose heart have been broken by sorrow and loss. Today we have 21,000 less countrymen than we had only a month ago. The heartache of knowing a loved one who has died has to be crushing for so many.

In addition, who of us have not known the despair of a broken heart, or the sense of betrayal at a loss of a job, or the terrible, unjust sentence either from a court or from a doctor who tells us how the remainder of our life is going to be? Mary is that person we know who has not ever been given a fair shake in life and she doesn't expect it now.

I just love that part where she is lost in her confusion, thinking this guy is the gravekeeper, and he gently says her name. "Mary." In that one moment, everything changes. Hope arrives in a life that never thought hope was available.

If that is you, he calls you by name today and he says, "I know it has been hard. I see those tears you have been weeping. But today I rise from the dead and I rise to call out your name, to take your hand, to lead you to a new life."

The second scene in John is with Thomas. Jesus has appeared to the disciples but Thomas was out. Maybe he was the designated shopper that night. He returns to their hideaway, expecting to find the same glum group that he left. He is completely wrong! They are dancing and singing. They are so excited! The news that the women had told them, the evidence that Peter and John had discovered in the tomb--it is all true!

“How do you know that?” Thomas must have said.

“Because we saw him!” they shouted. “He was here! He appeared to us and even showed us his wounds!”

Thomas doesn't know what they saw, but he thinks they have all lost their minds. He says that unless he sees Jesus with his own eyes--unless he places his hands in his wounds, he will not believe.

That must have put a little damper on the party! And it went on that way. For an entire week! Seven days of him making logical, clear sense that Jesus was dead and it was time to face reality. He could not have been the Messiah and they must have been wrong to ever follow him in the first place.

Thomas represents all of us in a sense. Our skepticism and doubt strips our faith of its strength. We just can't seem to get past certain things. We want to believe, but we didn't see it like they did. We weren't there, for some reason.

At the end of that week, there is another visit. Jesus has timed his arrival perfectly. The Bible says:

Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” 27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

28 Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

29 Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Jesus is speaking to every one of us who struggles with faith. He is not only blessing us who believe without seeing, but he is also promising to meet us where we are and take us to the next step in our journey. If you are doubting him today, realize

that the tomb is empty and that he is ready, even now, to come to you in your doubt and help your faith.

So those are two beautiful pictures of Easter and what it means. Jesus comes to us in our pain and in our loss. He also comes to us in our doubt and confusion. In a sense, most of us have been at one of these places. Maybe both.

But there is a third scene after the resurrection. And that is the one I want to concentrate on for today. Our text is John, chapter 21.

21 Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: **2** Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. **3** “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.

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

5 He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?” “No,” they answered.

6 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.

7 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. **8** The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. **9** When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." **11** 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. **12** Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. **13** Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. **14** This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

15 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."

16 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."

17 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. **18** 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." **19** Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

20 Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray

you?") **21** When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?"

22 Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." **23** Because of this, the rumor spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?"

24 This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

25 Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

We have one child still at home. His name is Max. He has four legs. And you know what he thinks is the best thing in the world? Quarantine! He thinks we have finally got things figured out. We just stay home and everybody is happy.

But don't you miss your old life? Wouldn't it be just great sometime to go to a restaurant again? If you work at a restaurant, wouldn't it be great to earn a paycheck again? We miss our jobs, we miss the old way of doing things, we miss our routines.

I have to believe that is what is going on for Peter. Now it is...we don't know how long, maybe another week after Jesus has risen. He has appeared to the twelve at least twice. He told them he would meet them in Galilee. They have gone to their old region and they are camped by the great lake.

Peter is ready to get back to normal, to the life he had known before. I'm going fishing, he says. Enough with the waiting and

whatever else was gnawing at him. Time to get some fresh air and do what he knew.

So seven guys go out that night. They toss that net out over the water and hear it slap onto the surface and gently fall into the sea. They pull the draw cords and haul that load of water and fish up to the side of the boat and then pull with all their might as the water drains and the fish are left inside.

It would have been exhausting work, hour after hour. This night, luck was not on their side. They hauled and hauled, they fished and fished. But they caught nothing. Day was breaking and it was time to go inside when they heard a voice from the shore.

“Friends, haven’t you caught any fish?”

“No!” they shouted back.

“Well, throw your net on the right side of the boat.”

They must have thought, “Really? After doing this all night?”

But then, “Who knows?” So they gave it a toss.

Whoosh! It hits the surface. Down it goes. The draw the cord and put their backs to it. They pull and pull and pull. The water begins to drain. They yank again, and there is the silvery, wrigling flash of fish.

And all of a sudden, Peter’s head snaps up. He knew who that was on shore! He knew because he had been through this same scenario three years ago. Jesus needed a boat to stand in to preach. He chose Peter, and then had him push out to sea when he was done. He hadn’t caught anything that night, either. Jesus told him to throw his net and see what he could catch.

It was the wrong time of day. It wasn’t going to happen. What did this guy know, Peter must have thought. Bt he let it fly. By the time he got the net into the boat, the whole thing was full to the brim with fish when they brought it into the boat.

It was right there, sitting with the biggest catch of his life, that Jesus issued him the greatest challenge of his life: **Peter, follow me and I will make you a fisher of men.**

Now it was happening again! Peter put on that garment and threw himself into the water. He **had** to get to Jesus. The others almost lost the load of fish! They decided to just row the boat in with the fish in tow.

Imagine Peter splashing out of the water, onto the shore, where Jesus is sitting by his fire, cooking some fish of his own. His natural enthusiasm--his joy--is caught in his throat. He wanting to say something--some word of how great it was to see him. But there was this...social distance between them. A frost had come over their relationship.

That old, gnawing ache in him was there again, the one he tried to ignore the night before as he went fishing. The one he had tried to ignore the past two weeks. The one that had been in him since Thursday night before Passover. That gnawing ache was tearing at his heart again.

Soon enough the others came, laughing and dragging up their net of fish. One commentator said that 153 represented the known countries of the world at the time. It is the illstrated Great Commission, where they go into all the world.

They brought over some of their fish. No one asked, "Who's this guy?" They knew it was Jesus. But they also knew there was something going on--you could cut the atmosphere with a knife.

And maybe they knew just what it was, because they had the gnawing, too. They, too, had run. They had left as fast as they could. What was their excuse? No one had talked about that night. But Peter--he had said so loudly that he would die for Jesus. And Jesus just stared him down with those sad eyes of

his and told him he would deny him three times before the sun rose. It was an ugly comment. It was a horrible night. And here's the thing: Jesus had been dead right.

Maybe there was some talk about what to do with all those fish as they finished their meal. Then they all looked to Jesus, who was stirring the fire. He had called them here. He was their master. What now?

Jesus calls him by his formal name. "Simon, son of John," he says. "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" Peter's words of that night came roaring back to him: "*Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.*" He was more faithful and loved Jesus more than any of these, he had said. Now he looked down, then looked at Jesus and said all that he could: "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." The simple charge followed, the charge to a shepherd of the sheep: Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

And perhaps he thought the trial had passed. Maybe he relaxed a little. Until that question came again. This time, there is no comparison to the others. It is just a straightforward, clear question about Peter's own heart:

Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He might as well have said, "Do you even care about me? Do I matter at all to you?"

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

Jesus says again, "Take care of my sheep."

He must have known by now it was coming. In my mind's eye, Jesus gets up from where he is sitting and goes over to Peter and shouts right in his face, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

The Bible says, “Peter **was hurt** because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” That third query cut him to the bone.

He answered a bit differently this time. He begins by saying he knows the jig is up: “**Lord, you know all things.**” In other words, you were right that night. You said I would betray you and I did. You said I was a failed follower and I am. You said I talk a great game but I will need you and I need your forgiveness. All of that is true.”

Peter is all of us who have ever said, “Lord, I give you my all!” and then taken back part of it. Let’s be honest: and then taken back **most** of it. Peter is us saying, “Whatever you want me to do, Lord, I’ll do!” and then, when the opportunity comes, we say, “Oh, Lord. I didn’t mean...that. I don’t really have the time. I’m not really good with those kinds of people. I am not able to spare the cash right now, Lord. Maybe...later.”

Peter is all of us who have believed but haven’t followed through, who have thought we were bigger and bolder than we really were. Peter is all of us who thought we could do it on our own, that we would impress God instead of saying, “Lord, if I am going to do this, I need you desperately.”

If that is you, you are also saying this morning the rest of what Peter said: “Lord you know all things...**you know that I love you.**”

Jesus tells Peter to feed his sheep again. But this time, I imagine he gave him a bear hug. Did you see the video of the daughter who put up a shower curtain outside so that she could hug her mother on the other side? We so need that contact!

Now Jesus gives Peter that hug--with no shower curtain involved! **He is saying, what was standing between us is gone.** That wall, that gnawing in your gut--it is done. And

Peter, your calling is re-established. In that one phrase, Peter is reinstated to the ministry.

And when Peter says, “What about that guy?” Jesus says, “Don’t worry about that guy. This is about you. And me. And this is the one thing you need to do: **follow me.**”

This Easter seems strange to all of us. We aren’t gathered as a large crowd. We have no finery that we are wearing. Most of you are in your sweat pants right now.

Nevertheless, the message of Easter is still true for you and me. The message is that you might have failed. You might have not been the man or woman you hoped to be. You might have once said “Yes!” to God and then fallen back. **But you are not done.**

Sure we all want to go fishing. We all want to get back to our life! **But much more important than getting back to how life used to be is to take stock of your relationship with Christ and decide you want to go forward not in the way life USED to be but in the way life COULD be.**

You can walk with him. You can recognize that your failure does not disqualify you. Your doubt does not disprove him. And your pain does not mean he is not calling your name right now.

There is only one thing for you and for me: You and I must follow him. Let **that** be your Easter resolution: Your failure is not greater than his sacrifice for you. He is waiting, there at the shore of your pain and doubt and failure with some fish on the fire and a little bread. And a bottle of truth. **He is not going to let the past keep you from him.**

Don’t you let it, either. This Easter is your chance to start anew. What do you need to do? You need to tell **him** the truth. Tell him where you failed. Tell him where you have

doubted. Tell him where your pain seemed to cry louder than his spirit. Tell him.

And then let him speak your name. Let him meet your need. Let him come to your shore and say to you the one thing you need to know:

- you are reinstated.
- You are called to feed the sheep.
- You are called to love people in his name.
- You are called to care for others like Jesus would care.

Like Peter, you too can be reinstated. It starts with the empty tomb. And it starts with a conversation with the Savior. It starts now, if you will let it.