

Sunday, April 19, 2020 – John 21:1-19

21 Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee.^[a] It happened this way: ² Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus^[b]), 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.^[c] 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." ¹⁸Very 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." ¹⁹Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

This is the word of the Lord for the people of the Lord. And all God's people said, Amen!

Well, good morning, and a very happy first Sunday of Easter to everybody. He is risen. He is risen indeed! So, I have an announcement to make this morning and it's an important announcement; the resurrection changed everything. Because of the resurrection, we know what the cross was all about. Because of Easter, we understand the meaning of Good Friday. At the cross, Jesus died in our place for our sins, he entered into our pain, and into our shame. Jesus came and took the weight of evil itself, so that its power in our lives can be broken.

And because Jesus didn't stay in the grave, we see that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is God, in His love, freeing us from the power of sin. God in His love, overcoming death. God in His love, announcing that one day, a new creation will come. Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus we see the love of God. When we look at Jesus, we honestly say, this is love.

I want to talk to you today about the first part of that, about God in His love, freeing us from sin. Sin is not a popular word in the church today. And actually, sin can be kind of a confusing word. So, let me just tell you a story.

I woke up one morning when my son was little because of the crash. Not a loud crash, but a crash. Before I could peel myself out of bed. I heard the pitter patter of Philip's tiny little feet, running up the stairs. Mom, my little six-year-old said in that most innocent sweet little tone that they usually use. Will you make me breakfast? Sure, I said. But what happened just now. Well, I was starving mom, and I tried to make myself some oatmeal. I guessed the rest of what had happened. Phillip had successfully gotten the instant oatmeal into a bowl; he had filled the bowl with water and put it in microwave. But he had misjudged how hot the bowl would be when the oatmeal was ready. And dropping the hot bowl is just human instinct.

I wasn't mad about the bowl, it was pretty old and it was pretty inexpensive to begin with, so that wasn't the problem. But I really was puzzled because he had then tried to clean up the mess of the oatmeal and the broken bowl with a mop, pretty unsuccessfully. And now there was oatmeal all over the kitchen floor, and the mop was a mess too. And I said, why didn't you just come get me and ask for help. I would have come and helped you clean this up. Well before he could respond the answer became pretty evident to me. It's hard enough to ask for help, but it's even harder when you have to ask for help to clean up a mess that you created.

And so, that's pretty much how we are as adults. We don't want to ask God for help. We want to do it on our own. We want to take matters into our own hands. When a mess ensues, we resist asking for help again because this time, we're either embarrassed or ashamed of what we've done. Asking for help to resolve a mess that we've made means admitting that we're at fault. And we don't want to admit that either.

Guilt is an uncomfortable feeling for we human beings and sorry, is a very uncomfortable word. We'd rather deny it, we'd rather ignore it, we'd rather recover on our own, or even justify our actions. But

admitting anything that we've done wrong is painful. But it doesn't go away. The feeling that we've fallen short that we've failed in some way just eats away at us.

Our culture really doesn't have a word for that. We tend to psychoanalyze it. We psychoanalyze our shortcomings. They can be recast as the result of someone else's failure. We're that way because of our parents, or that way because of our community, or that way because of the poor education we received, or that way because of the systems that are in place.

And all these things are true enough, systems can impart me the blame, but that doesn't erase our problem. If anything, it just expands the problem. It isn't just individuals who have failed us in some way. It's entire communities, it's systems. And still, what's the word for that. Well the Bible has a word for that. It's called sin.

Sin is the sense of missing the mark. Failing to be who God created us to be. It's a falling short of our original vocation, which is to love and serve God. The first calling to be God's image bearers, the persons who reflect God's wisdom and His love and His role in the world.

Sin is also rebellion. It's a turning away from God as a decision to move against his will, or a decision to move independently of Him. It's a transgression. It's a crossing of a line or a boundary. It's a violation of another person. And ultimately, sin is a power. It's sin, with a capital S, that holds us captive and paralyzes us with shame. Take all of it together and you realize that sin is a dead end. It is one grand game over. So, what do we do?

There was a follower of Jesus who had fallen short in a very spectacular way. In fact, his failure was so dramatic and so epic that his story just should have ended right there, and his name was Peter. He wasn't just one of Jesus's followers. He was one of Jesus's closest friends, and his sin wasn't just a crossing the line or minor departure, or coming up just a wee bit short his sin was a flat-out denial of Jesus. Not once, not twice, three times.

It's no wonder then Peter had gone back to his old way of life. He seemed to still be around the disciples, but he wasn't quite the same. He certainly wasn't the leader, and he was called to be. And when they heard the news that Jesus was alive. Peter and John ran to the empty tomb. John got there first and Peter followed. I imagine a little bit tentatively considering the situation. We have no idea what Peter thought, John doesn't say.

And then Jesus appeared to Mary, and he called her by name. And then Jesus appeared to His disciples, passing through a locked door into the room where they were hiding. And if that wasn't enough Thomas then asked to see his wounds. And Jesus showed him, his hands and his feet. Was Peter there in the room with the disciples? John doesn't say.

But then at the next chapter John gives us this long encounter with Peter in the risen Jesus. And Peter who still seems to be in contact with the disciples announces that he's going fishing. They say they'll go with him. Were they trying to encourage their crestfallen friend? Maybe. Were they trying to keep him company in the midst of his shame? Maybe. Or were they also distraught and so on the verge of giving up, that all they thought of was going back to what they had done before. Likely. Simon says I'm going fish. What must have been feeling. Maybe Jesus was alive, but that only makes things worse in Peter's mind. Now, that he knows I shouldn't have denied him, follow this train of thought, and he knows that I didn't deny him. How can I face him?

It's hard to say I'm sorry, especially when the wrong is that deep. So how can Peter recover from it. Peter was supposed to be the leader. He had walked on water. He had confessed Jesus is the Messiah. And now he had denied him. How can he regain credibility with his friends, let alone make it up to Jesus? It's a wonder that the other disciples still hung around him, except that they were just as confused, just as heartbroken, and just as weary of everything that was going on, as the others were.

See, that's what shame does. It isolates us. It tells us we're the only ones that have ever been guilty of anything of that nature. It says our sin is uniquely disqualifying that no one else has ever done anything quite like it. No one else has ever hurt anybody quite the same, quite as deeply. It makes us the exception in the worst possible way. We're the one person who can't be forgiven. We've done the one thing that cannot be set right. We've gone past the point of return and we've fallen too far. That's what we believe. Shame tells us, game over.

And in a sense, it's true, because sin is a dead end. As the Bible puts it, the wages of sin is death, in Romans 6:23. That kind of sin that comes from actual guilt isn't a liar either. It just tells the story as it stands, but it tells the story without Jesus in it. Jesus shows up that day in the middle of Peter's fishing trip and teaches them something entirely different than what their shame has been teaching them.

And what I love about the moment that Jesus meets Peter is that he meets Peter where he's at. Peter tries to retreat into his old familiar trade, his old familiar place, his comfort zone. And Jesus intrudes and meets him there. And Jesus didn't just meet Peter there, Jesus reenacts the scene of Peter's first calling. It's like he's taking Peter back to the start, where it all began.

But something's different this time. The resurrection has occurred. Jesus is alive. Not with his old life. That wasn't just a resuscitation of a dead body. Jesus was raised to a new life. His body was transformed into a new kind of body. That's part of John's point in telling us the things that Jesus did, after the resurrection, appearing in locked rooms and eating fish and bread on the beach just to prove that this is me. And I am still with you.

There were things about his resurrection, that were like his previous body and there were things that were very different. And the resurrection life is like that. It's the completion and perfection of all that is good and true and beautiful that we know. The resurrection changes everything. And it changed the way Jesus called Peter. When Jesus first called Peter, it was all about purpose. Come and follow me and I will make you fishers of men. Three times Jesus asked Peter, do you love me, in this instance. (There's a whole sermon there but not today.)

When we retreat in shame, Jesus comes after us again and again and again. His love doesn't stop chasing us. His love never lets go of us. His love changes everything. And what Jesus does for Peter, he wants to do for each one of us.

Before he found Peter and spoke to him, he had appeared to the disciples. They were in a locked room, afraid, and confused and wondering if Jesus really had been raised from the dead or if his body truly had been stolen. And if so, what the resurrection might mean for them. The risen Jesus comes and he brings new life with him, the life of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, and he breathes it into his followers. He announces that true peace is theirs. No more fear. No more shame. No more guilt. Just peace.

The true and deep sense of being put back together again. Of setting things right in our lives. Of being set right with God, and with each other. And then Jesus sends them out into the world. This piece is not just for them, the newness of life is not for the select few. The good news is the good news for the world. Because of the resurrection. Sin can be forgiven. Hearts can be set right. It makes all the difference.

So, think of it, for a minute. Our sins, the ones we still have, the occasions when we miss the mark, when we fall short. When our transgressions and our actions cross lines. We can be forgiven because Jesus died and rose again. Now we all know that. The power of sin that has kept us bound, that paralyzed us, that held us in the same patterns of failure is broken. We don't often think of that.

The power of sin that kept us bound is broken. All we have to do is appropriate that strength to stay out of those situations. To be forgiven, is to be set free. We're free from guilt, we're free from shame, we're free from the power that previously enslaved us. And we're free to be fully human. To be what God made us to be. To reflect his image. To reflect his wisdom, and his love to the entire world.

Peter's life changed that day. He went on to lead the start of a movement that would eventually be known as the church. He preached boldly. He suffered greatly. He shepherded a flock of believers and he taught them what it meant to be forgiven and free. A deep love for Jesus anchored him through even the most difficult days. And it all began the day that Jesus found him on the shore and restored him.

You see when Jesus spoke to him on the shore, Jesus said, do you love me? Agape - Love. A love that is selfless, a love that is pure and a love that will cling to someone and defend them at all costs. Peter answered him with yes, Lord, I love you, philia. I love you like a brother. And that's because at that moment, that's all Peter had to give but Jesus took it. Jesus was willing to take it.

And once Peter had been forgiven and restored, as he goes forward to preach, he preaches about loving Jesus. Agape. A love that hangs, on a love that is pure, a love that is strong. He found that love the day that Jesus restored him.

Our lives can change today too. The whole trajectory of life can change, because no matter where we are, no matter who we are, there are those things that drag us down. There are those little petty sins that we can't seem to get rid of. And there are times when sin seems to hold sway over us. No matter how hard we try, we can't get beyond that one thing that holds us captive. And we think, game over. That we've hit a dead end. Because of the mistakes that we've made or the destructive habits that we're caught in, or maybe just that petty little thing, anger, frustration, who knows what it might be. But it's not game over.

Our enemy, the devil would like us to believe that it's over. But just as it wasn't over the day that Jesus died on the cross and was buried, it's not over. Because Jesus carried our sin upon himself to the cross. Because God raised Jesus from the dead, brought him victorious over sin into new life. It's not over. Sin is not the end.

The Scriptures tell us that God shows his love for us in this, because that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). While we were the enemies of God. While we were stuck in sin. While we were caught in Satan's trap, Jesus came and died for us. Before we knew how to call his name, God came running after us. And God still comes running after us. Just like he did that day with Peter. Today is your day. Whatever you feel ensnares you, today is your day. This is love. And it can change everything.

Lord Jesus, we need your help. We feel so often that we've hit a dead end, that we're stuck. We don't always want to admit it, but it's true. Sometimes we cross a line that we shouldn't have crossed or we fall short of what your design is for our lives. But still you call for us. You come to us. You died for us, you were raised up for us, and you call to us. So today, each of us says, I'm giving you my life in a fuller way. I want love you fully. I want to follow you closely. And I know I can't do it on my own. Because while I live in this body, I have life, but I need more than that. I need the resurrection life, the spirit breathed into me just as you breathed the spirits into those early disciples.

We receive your spirit. We welcome your saving rule in our lives. We receive your forgiveness and your freedom. We thank you for peace. We are yours. In your name Jesus, Amen.