

I Have Failed the Lord  
John 21:1-19  
April 10, 2016

*After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. 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. Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net on 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 of the quantity of fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off. When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. 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." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved 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. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me."*

Today's reading from the Gospel according to Saint John is probably familiar to most of us. The high point of the reading is a short conversation between Peter and Jesus. Peter had committed a serious betrayal of Jesus. The situation needed to be resolved.

Since we have all failed the Lord at one time or another in our lives, our focus today is on how Jesus handled Peter's betrayal. What Peter did, we do. The sting of sin that Peter felt, we feel. And the way Jesus solved Peter's sin will also work on our sin.

The first step in Jesus' plan to restore Peter was confrontation. Jesus didn't beat around the bush. He confronted Peter with the real problem at hand, because the problem wasn't the betrayal, it was the depth of Peter's love for Jesus.

Jesus opens by reminding Peter who he was before he met Jesus. Jesus doesn't address him as Peter. Peter was the name Jesus gave him when he called Peter to follow him. He calls him Simon, son of John.

When you were young and your mother called you using your full name, you knew you were in trouble. I'm sure Peter felt the end was near. Using his given name, Jesus was pointing out the difference that was supposed to exist between Simon, son of John, fisher of fish, and Peter, disciple of Christ, fisher of men.

Why did Jesus make such a big deal out of who Peter used to be and who Peter was supposed to be? Because Peter's denial of Jesus, before his crucifixion, caused Peter to redirect his life in the wrong direction. Let's examine that.

Jesus didn't need to remind Peter that he had denied him three times. I'm sure Peter would never forget that night. Those three denials would be handled, but first there was the redirection of Peter's life.

What was Peter's occupation before he was called by Jesus? A fisherman. What was Peter doing when Jesus appeared to the disciples in today's reading? Fishing. Peter had reverted back to what he was before he met Jesus. Peter, fisher of men, had returned to being Simon, son of John, fisher of fish.

The discouragement and shame of his failure had driven a wedge between Peter and his Savior. He had no business fishing for fish. Peter had been called away from his old life. The Lord had set Peter on a new course and he was never to go back to being who he used to be.

Peter needed to be reminded of what was truly important. His old life wasn't important. His betrayal wasn't important. What was important was his love for Jesus.

When Jesus asked, "*Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?*" Jesus wasn't asking Peter if he loved him more than the other disciples loved him. This had nothing to do with the other disciples. Jesus wanted Peter to face the true priorities in his life.

Simon, son of John, do you love me more than your boats and nets? Simon, son of John, do you love me more than you love your friends? Simon, son of John, do you love me more than your old way of life? Simon, son of John, do you love me enough to live up to your earlier promise? Let's look at Peter's earlier promise.

Mark chapter 14: *Peter said to [Jesus], "Even though they all fall away, I will not." And Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." But he said emphatically, "If I must die with you, I will not deny you."* (Mk 14:29-31 ESV).

Those were some pretty strong words. However, when Jesus asked, "*Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?*" he wasn't looking for bold statements and a lot of chess pounding. Jesus was looking for a real commitment of love.

The next step in restoring Peter, was for Jesus to hear a true confession. A true confession can only come from an honest and pure heart. A true and honest confession is a matter of repentance; a matter of turning around and going the other direction. That's a true and honest confession. There are three things that are not a true and honest confession.

**A true and honest confession is not regret.** Regret is what Pilate experienced. Pilate regretted his decision to have Jesus crucified. He tried to wash the stain of innocent blood from his hands, but it's not that easy. Regret is not confession.

**A true and honest confession is not remorse.** Remorse is what the rich young man felt when Jesus told him to sell his possessions and give the money to the poor. The Bible says the young man was filled with sorrow. But sorrow is not confession.

**A true and honest confession is not restitution.** Restitution is what Judas tried to perform when he attempted to give back the money he was paid to betray Jesus. Restitution, trying to undo the harm you have done, is not confession.

A true and honest confession, the kind of confession that Jesus wanted from Peter involves a change of heart, a change of mind, a change of direction. A true and honest confession is going to hurt. When we are truly sorry for our sins, it's going to pain our souls.

Peter was hurt when he heard the rooster crow the second time. The text tells us he was hurt when Jesus questioned his love for the third time. But that kind of pain is good. It means we have truly and honestly faced who and what we are. Paul tells us: *Godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death* (2 Co 7:10 ESV). Jesus is looking for godly sorrow.

The final step in Peter's restoration to what God wanted him to be, is something the world doesn't understand. Unfortunately, many of today's Christians and Christian churches don't understand it either.

Each time Jesus asked Peter about his love, and Peter affirmed his love for Jesus, Jesus issued a new commission for Peter. Listen once again:

*"Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs."* (Jn 21:15 ESV).

*"Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep."* (Jn 21:16 ESV).

*"Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."* (Jn 21:17 ESV).

Peter had once been a fisher of fish. Then Jesus called Peter to be a fisher of men. Now Peter was being commissioned to be a pastor – to tend to Jesus’ sheep and to care for his lambs.

It has been said that the Christian army is the only army that shoots its own wounded. Christians and Christian churches seem to find it easier to forgive the unbelievers, who are outside of the flock, than to forgive the believers, who are inside of the flock. We need a lesson from Jesus.

Peter had failed, but he wasn’t forsaken. Jesus had confronted Peter with his sin and Jesus had heard Peter’s confession, but Jesus’ response wasn’t condemnation – it was reconciliation. Instead of driving Peter away, Jesus restored Peter. He gave Peter a new role. He gave Peter a new beginning. Our God is the God of second changes.

Throughout Scripture we find people who have failed God. When they did, God didn’t desert them, he gave them another chance, another opportunity to serve him. Maybe you’ve heard about some of these people who failed the Lord: Adam and Eve, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, King David, Moses, Jonah, Samson, Matthew, Nicodemus, Thomas, and good old Peter.

Two weeks ago we celebrated Easter. The message of Easter is a message of reconciliation, a message of second chances, a message of new beginnings. Everyone knows the wonderful news of John 3:16: *God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life* (Jn 3:16 ESV). But only the ones who know, for sure, they have failed their Lord can experience the joy of John 3:17: *God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him* (Jn 3:17 ESV).

Just a few weeks after the scene in today’s text would come the first Christian Pentecost. On that day, Peter, the failure, would become Peter, the preacher, and his words would lead 3,000 people to faith. Peter, the failure, would become Peter, a shepherd of Jesus’ flock.

Peter, the man who once publicly denied Jesus, the man who tried to ignore his calling from God and return to his old life, would now become Peter, the man with a new beginning.

Friends, I’ve walked you through Peter’s story because I know that somewhere in your life you have failed the Lord. We all have failed the Lord. We all need a new beginning. No matter who you are, no matter how you have failed the Lord, when you confront your sin and repent of your sin, Jesus has a new beginning for you.