

**May 15, 2022**

**John 21:1-14**

**The Future Is So Bright...**

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I've told you before that when I was a teenager, I spent some time going to youth group, at various churches, with friends. One of the things that seemed commonplace at every single youth group I visited was a system set up to reward teens for memorizing scripture. Some churches gave out prizes weekly, while others entered the names of successful memorizers into a monthly drawing for movie tickets or a free pizza. Being an outsider looking in, I didn't really understand the point as I watched while, 10 minutes before youth group, my friends frantically memorized the shortest verses they could find. Not surprisingly, rarely could they remember those verses on the car ride home. "Jesus wept," was a favorite.

As I look back, had these churches focused more on making all teens feel welcome and less on who could regurgitate scripture verses they didn't understand, maybe I, and teens like me, would have hung around. But the truth was, they gave me no reason to care about the words in the Bible and mostly it was clear those churches didn't care much about me...or at least that was my perception. As a church leader, these experiences have formed the way I think about what our ministry to and with children and youth ought to be about. It's simple. I want every child and every teen to know that at DCC there are people, besides the ones they live with, who love them and who care about them. If they know that, we have succeeded, even if they can't recite a single Bible verse ever. Because you know what...when we love them well, we are telling them, through our actions, what the Bible says and maybe giving them a reason to want to read it for themselves.

Today, celebrating our high school graduates, has given me one more opportunity to tell Nate and Lorena that we love them, and they always have a place here and people here who care about what happens in their lives. Today's text reminded me that there is something else I think they should know as they burst forth into adulthood. Sometimes, in the excitement of high school graduation, as we are busy saying things to them like, "These will be the best years of your life," we forget to prepare them for what many of us know is ahead. Nate and Lorena, you

are going to make mistakes and some of them will feel so big that you will fear you won't recover from them. I want you to know that you will. You will find hope, forgiveness, grace, and purpose on the other side of even your biggest mistakes. I promise.

Our scripture this morning, John 21:1-19, is a story primarily about Peter and his mistakes and how Jesus responds to him knowing he had stumbled a bit.

**21** After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he showed himself in this way. <sup>2</sup> Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. <sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach, but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup> Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." <sup>6</sup> He said to them, "Cast the net to 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 there were so many fish. <sup>7</sup> That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he had taken it off, and jumped into the sea. <sup>8</sup> But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

<sup>9</sup> When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." <sup>11</sup> So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them, and though there were so many, the net was not torn. <sup>12</sup> Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup> Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them and did the same with the fish. <sup>14</sup> This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

<sup>15</sup> 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." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." <sup>16</sup> A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." <sup>17</sup> He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt 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. <sup>18</sup>Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.” <sup>19</sup>(He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, “Follow me.”

Chapter 21 is the last chapter in the Gospel of John. If you were here last week, you heard me read the last part of chapter 20, which sounds very much like how we might imagine a gospel author would want to end their book, “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup>But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.” And then we turn the page and there is chapter 21 with another post resurrection story. You should know that scholars think this chapter was added later. Someone, probably someone connected with the author of John’s community, wrote this little addition, although, to be clear, this chapter appears in all the ancient manuscripts of this Gospel.

Nobody knows for sure why whoever wrote it did so, but based on its contents, we could guess that maybe the community wanted to clean Peter’s story up a little bit. I mean, he denied Jesus three times and after Jesus’s death, he went with the Beloved Disciple to the tomb, seeing that Jesus’s body wasn’t there, he went away to hide. Peter was an important leader in the early church, it makes sense that early Christians would want something they could point to that says, “See, Jesus forgave Peter and commissioned him to continue his work.”

At the beginning of this story, it still doesn’t look good for Peter. He announced to 6 other disciples present that he was going fishing. But not the kind of fishing you do when you want to take your mind off your problems. You know, where you drop a line in the water, pop open a Mountain Dew and chill. No, this was “I make my living fishing,” kind of fishing. Essentially, the disciples went back to doing what they were doing before they met Jesus. It was as if Jesus had never happened. This story even takes place in Galilee. The disciples left Jerusalem and went back where they came from and essentially picked up where they left off. So

much for resurrection, new life, and bringing about the kin-dom of God. And that's where Jesus found them.

The disciples fished all night and didn't catch anything. Are we surprised that nighttime did not yield good things in the Gospel of John? No, we aren't! Why? Because we've seen before that night/darkness is a symbol for unbelief in this Gospel. We've seen it again and again, beginning with the story of Nicodemus, who came to Jesus at night to ask questions and went away unable to see what Jesus had come to reveal.

At daybreak, though, as they approached land, Jesus, whom they did not recognize, suggested they try casting the net on the right side of the boat. They did and caught lots of fish. This display of abundance having enough and more than enough, caused the disciples to recognize Jesus. They were accustomed to there being more than enough when Jesus was around...think about the water to wine sign at the wedding and the time Jesus served thousands of people from a little bit of bread and fish. In the Gospel of John, these signs have pointed us to the over-the-top abundance of God.

When Peter heard that the guy on the shore was Jesus, he put on his outer garment and jumped into the sea. I wonder if Peter thought that if he swam to shore, he would get there first. Maybe he wanted to talk to Jesus alone, before the others got there. Peter, who had three times denied Jesus. Peter, who was now found by Jesus, back in Galilee, fishing, as if he their three years together had never happened. Maybe, assuming Jesus was going to say some hard things to him, Peter raced to him so he would say them privately. Maybe Peter didn't want his shame broadcast to the other disciples. It was enough that he lived with it everyday.

Whatever Peter thought Jesus would want to say to him, I bet it was not what we hear Jesus say, "Come and have breakfast." Jesus invited Peter and the others to eat with him that day. He broke the bread and gave it to them, along with the fish. They ate. I wonder what they talked about around that fire, a fire that might have reminded Peter of the fire he was warming himself by after Jesus's arrest, when he was asked if he was one of his disciples. What was going through Peter's mind as they finished eating, as the charcoal began to cool off in the morning air?

After breakfast, Jesus finally addressed Peter, “Do you love me?” It was a reasonable question given Peter’s denial, given the speed with which he seemed to have gone back to his old life. He asked him that three times and three times Peter said, “Yes.” Each time Peter answered him, Jesus told him to feed or tend his sheep. Jesus knew Peter’s heart and, certainly, Jesus knew how scary the night of his arrest was for all of them. He didn’t shame or berate Peter. There was no judgement. But there was accountability. Peter denied Jesus three times and three times Jesus asked Peter if he loved him, “Do you mean what you say this time? Is this the truth? And if you do mean it, the way to live into it is by taking care of each other and the ones who are most vulnerable. Feed my sheep.”

Jesus reminds us here that love doesn’t shame, it invites us into relationship, into our better selves, and back to the table. Love feeds us and nourishes us. It helps us prepare to make the next right decision, to sort ourselves out, and to live into what we believe...about ourselves, other human beings, and God. This story shows us that even when we do the unthinkable, whatever the unthinkable is, it is never too late to swim to shore, allow ourselves to be nourished and cared for, and to do things differently.

This is true for all of us, and it would serve us well to remember this because we all make mistakes that hurt ourselves and hurt other people. Raise your hand if you have made a serious mistake and hurt yourself or someone else. Nate and Lorena, do you see this? You are in a room full of people who are among the kindest, most compassionate, intelligent, purpose-driven people I have ever met. They serve each other and this community selflessly. And they have all messed things up from time to time. And yet...here we are, gathered in this space to keep learning how to love better...how to love God, each other, and our neighbors better. And sometimes they come, needing to be reminded that the love they share with other people is for them too.

In a world that can sometimes make us afraid to do or say the wrong things, I want this lesson to be real to you, so I asked some of the people in this faith community to share with me a mistake they made when they were 18-22 years old, as evidence that the mistakes that you will make as you learn to adult will not keep you from living into the person you were created to be. And they generously shared them.

Somebody in this room went to college on a full scholarship and partied like a rock star and lost it all.

Somebody in this room got pregnant the summer she graduated from high school and never told her parents.

Somebody in this room ran from the university police while he and some friends were sneaking into their dorm after being out partying. The police found his picture in the directory and confronted him. He was summoned to the Dean's office where he found out he could be expelled. Instead, he was put on detention for a month of weekends. He said there was a moment when it felt like the end of the world.

Somebody in this room snuck around with their best friend's boyfriend for months before the friend found out. Fortunately, the friendship survived, and the boyfriend moved along.

Somebody in this room lied to their parents and told them they didn't get into the college their parents went to so that they could attend the college they really wanted to go to.

Somebody in this room kidnapped their sibling and ran away from home.

Somebody in this room got fired from their first two jobs.

Somebody in this room wrecked their parents' car and told them someone stole it and wrecked it. When the police got involved, they came clean.

Lots of mistakes and bewildering choices. None of them the end of the world. None of them caused God to love them less.

Thank you all for your vulnerability. It takes courage to be vulnerable. And our willingness to be vulnerable builds community and teaches our young people that being human is beautiful and that this is a place you can come with your real self, even when you mess things up. And what I want you, Nate and Lorena, to learn from Peter's story and from the little bits of our stories I have shared, is that when you make a mistake or a series of mistakes, that does not make you a bad human, it makes you human. We've all made mistakes and had to live with the consequences of them and you will too. But please remember, on the other side of every mistake, even the ones that seem like they are the end of the word, there are opportunities for new choices and for growth. That is the message of the Easter season. And that is the message I want to leave with our graduates and with all of us who continue to show up with our humanness every single day. You are loved...come and eat!