

“Resurrecting Disciples”  
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John 21:1-19

There is a story about a minister who would stand before his congregation every Sunday and say, “You know what folks? You are on a slippery slope. Whether you know it or not, you are bound for Hell.” Yet the people didn’t stop coming, they came faithfully each week. When it was time for the minister to move on, the congregation reluctantly said goodbye and some of them even wept.

Then the congregation called a new minister. On the very first day, the minister stood before the congregation and said, “You people are all going to hell! Do you hear what I am saying? You are bound for ruin!” This went on for a few weeks until the church board decided they better have a meeting with this new minister. When they met, the board shared its concern over what their new minister was saying. The minister replied, “Well I don’t understand, I’m not saying anything different your previous minister?” One of the board members responded, “Well yes, we know that, but when he told us we were going to hell, he sounded sad about it!”

I think there’s a message in that story for those of us who are called to preach the gospel. Sometimes it’s not only what you say but how you say it! But not only is it what you say and how you say it, I think that *how often* one says it has something to do with it too. How about the exchange between Jesus and Peter in this text? Three times Jesus asks Peter if he loves him.

We don’t know how Jesus said it either. We don’t know if he was pointing to the boats and the fish and the nets or if he was referring to the other disciples when he said, “Simon son of John do you love me more than these?” Or did he get in close to Peter and whisper gently, “Simon Son of John, do you love me?” Or maybe he looked him straight in the eye and said, “Simon Son of John do you love me?” All we know is that three times Peter is asked by Jesus if he loves him, and three times he says, “Yes, I love you” “I love you Jesus.” “I love you.” But there is more going on here.

Let's think about what Jesus is saying. Each time Jesus addresses Peter as "Simon, Son of John." This is curious because in the very first chapter of John's gospel when Jesus initially meets Peter he says, "'You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter which means Rock)." But here in the last chapter of the Gospel, in the last recorded conversation we have between them, Jesus doesn't call him Cephas or Peter. Had Peter lost his place as a disciple in the eyes of his master? Had his future changed? Was he no longer the Rock? No wonder the text says that Peter felt hurt.

The reality was that Peter (or Simon Son of John) had gone off track and was on the verge of missing his calling. It all started those three times Peter rejected Jesus the night before he was crucified. That's significant because according to Roman custom, Jesus had an opportunity to have someone speak in his defence during his trial, someone who knew him, someone like Peter who instead denied being a disciple and denied knowing Jesus.

Further, as we get to this reading today, Peter and the disciples have already encountered the risen Jesus. Jesus had stood among them when they were locked away in a room and Jesus had sent them out in the Spirit. But what does Peter do? He goes back to what he did before he was with Jesus, before he was called Cephas or Peter. Peter went fishing in the Galilee. Peter doesn't seem interested in the least in being a disciple. But as the text tells us, his return to fishing was fruitless. He and the other disciples fish all night and catch nothing. That is until Jesus appears. And when Jesus is present, and they listen to his voice and follow his directions, their nets are full to overflowing. Peter is so excited that Jesus is there to help them he jumps into the water and swims ashore to meet Jesus. That's why I like to call this passage the Resurrection of Peter, because it really is about Peter finally coming around and recognizing his true calling as a disciple.

It is there on the beach, next to a smoldering fire, just after Jesus had cooked them breakfast and fed them that Peter's threefold confession is answered by Jesus with the threefold directive to "feed my lambs," "tend my sheep," and "feed my sheep." Peter could no longer run off and be Simon Son of John anymore. It was time for him to discover his true calling as a disciple of Jesus. It's as Jesus says to him: "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." Jesus is saying, "Look Peter, maybe you used to do your own thing but now the time has come for you to discover the life God has for you. It's time to follow me and listen to the Spirit." Peter has been resurrected to a new life as a true disciple of Jesus. How many others discovered their call over the ages because of Peter's own confession of love?

God knows the world would be a different place if we not only listened for the voice of Jesus in our lives, but if we actually responded with a confession of love. Words of love are what this world needs more than any other. Yes, how we say things can matter, but more important is what we say and to whom. And we need to say words of love over and over. We need to hear, "I love you." Even Jesus needs to hear, "I love you," over and over and over.

This past week as I listened to the story about Reahteah Parsons and was reminded of the similar tragedy last fall involving Kayla Wright, I become more convinced that we have a responsibility to speak words of love to others. To offer others the food for their souls they so desperately need. I know that Jesus fed the multitudes and there is something symbolic about him cooking breakfast for his disciples on the beach that call us to a ministry of feeding the hungry. But the greatest hunger in this world is a deeper hunger for love. Love shown to the crucified, the rejected and the shamed. Sometimes it's the love in our hearts that needs resurrection. That is what the resurrection of Peter reveals to us. It's the resurrection of love.

Ours is a world full of cold judgement and hard facts. For countless individuals, words of judgment ring louder and strike deeper than any word of love. We can hear the words God loves you and Jesus loves you but they go in one ear and out the other. When this is the case then I suppose Christ did die in vain. But I hope not, just as I hope that girls like Rheateah Parsons and Kayla Wright don't die in vain. Remember when Jesus was nailed to the cross, he became a source of shame, even resurrected he bore the scars of his rejection and execution. On the day Christ died, it was the words of hate and the world's judgments that shouted louder than God's love. And as an eternal event, we might say that it is on *the days* that Christ *dies*, that words of hate and harsh judgment still have their greatest power. This is why like Peter, we have to look to the one we have rejected, the one we have denied, the one we have judged harshly. We turn and say, "I love you." When we can confess love for the one we have rejected,

the one we have denied, when we can proclaim our love for Jesus. When we do this the world is fed.

One of the questions I have been asked since returning from the holy land is what was the big highlight for you? That's not an easy question! Every day, multiple times a day, I find myself somewhere experiencing something that can be difficult to put into words. However, one of the most meaningful experiences for me occurred on the Sea of Galilee or Lake Tiberias as it is referred to in today's text.

It was a beautiful morning when we boarded our boat for a ride on the Galilee. The name of the boat was Faith -and so it was on Faith that we journeyed out on the water. It was calm, the sun was shining, and we were warmly welcomed by the boat's crew, who were themselves Christians. Our group made up the bulk of the passengers and the ship's crew actually raised the Canadian Flag and played "O Canada" as we embarked. But it wasn't just us Canadians on board, there were a few other passengers who joined us on the boat that day. They were a small group of Swedish business people.

I had a chance to speak with them and they shared with me that they had come to the Holyland with each other in order to spend some time in prayer and talk about how they could better incorporate their Christian faith into their business practices. Not only in how they conducted their business, but in sharing with others how knowing Jesus changed them and the way they conducted their business. I was truly inspired by their witness and their faith. I cannot begin to describe for you the sheer joy I experienced as we all gathered on the deck of the boat and shared Communion. -A bunch of Canadians mostly from Mississauga and around the GTA, the ships Galilean crew and our Swedish brothers and sisters.

Afterwards one of the Swedish men came up to me and wanted to thank me for allowing them to join in on our boat ride and share the Lord's Supper with us. I spoke from my heart when I told him I wouldn't have it any other way, because I knew that Jesus wouldn't have it any other way. Besides, it wasn't me feeding them during communion on that boat ride, we were fed by the Spirit. Our faith strengthened as we stood together confessing our love of Christ.

It was a moment of affirmation for me. It was one of those moments when my Christian faith connected me to others in a way, that I could've hardly imagined possible at another time

in my life. It was a moment of comprehension – how we are called to venture out into new places to speak the word of God’s love. It really does mean having a humble heart and an open mind. It means confessing your love for Jesus. A confession that will take you to new places. It may just cause you to reassess what you can do to make that Christian difference in this world through the life you live. Like Peter you may find yourself a resurrected disciple.

Sarah Young, who after many years of writing to God in her prayer journals, decided to set time to listen to what Christ had to say. She says this journey changed her life forever. She came to understand that Jesus always speaks a word of love to us. What she wrote in her book, “Jesus Calling” were the words she heard God speaking to her. I want to end this morning sharing with you one of her “listenings” of what Jesus had to say to her:

“I am leading you along a way that is uniquely right for you. The closer to Me you grow, the more fully you become your true self – the one I designed you to be. Because you are one of a kind, the path you are travelling with me diverges increasingly from that of other people. However, in my mysterious wisdom and ways, I enable you to follow this solitary path while staying in close contact with others. In fact, the more completely you devote yourself to me, the more freely you can love people.

Marvel at the beauty of a life intertwined with My Presence. Rejoice as we journey together in intimate communion. Enjoy the adventure of finding yourself through losing yourself in me.”

Jesus said, “Simon Son of Peter, do you love me?”

How would Jesus ask you that question? How many times has he asked you that question? We know the answer.

“Yes Lord, You know that I love you.”

Then follow me.