

“Love Will Find a Way”

John 21:1-19

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor

First Baptist Church

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I wonder what Peter thought when Jesus singled him out from the other disciples and started asking him questions. How do you feel when someone you disappointed wants to talk to you? I think you know how Peter felt.

What did Peter do that was so bad? He denied knowing Jesus during the trial which preceded the crucifixion. Each time he was identified as one of Jesus' disciples, he adamantly denied it even though he promised Jesus he would never abandon him. Now, the resurrected Jesus wanted to talk to Peter.

This awkward encounter occurred on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Seems Peter and some of the disciples had been fishing all night but caught nothing. As the sun was coming up, a stranger on the shore asked if they had caught anything. When they told him they had not, he advised them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat.

When they did as they were told, they caught so many fish it was impossible to haul them into the boat. As they were dragging the net to the shore, John recognized who this fishing guide was, the Risen Lord. Upon hearing this, Peter jumped out of the boat and rushed to the shore.

When he reached the shore, he smelled charcoal burning and noticed Jesus was preparing breakfast. Jesus asked for some of the fish that had just been caught and invited Peter and the disciples to sit down and eat.

After they had eaten, Jesus turned to Peter and asked him if he loved him. He did this three times, the exact number of times Peter denied Jesus the night the Lord was arrested.

Every time Peter assured Jesus he did, Jesus told him to feed or tend his sheep, a reference to taking care of people the way they had been doing during Jesus' earthly ministry. I think it is obvious Jesus was calling Peter a second time from his life as a fisherman to follow him and be a fisher of men.

Why do you think this story found its way into the last chapter of the fourth gospel? I think the writer wanted to use it as an example of the redemptive power of love. Broken relationships can be repaired because, as that 1978 song popularized by the Pablo Cruise Band tells us, “love will find a way.”

On Easter Sunday, we looked at that tender encounter between Jesus and Mary at the tomb. The same Mary who made her way to the tomb early that morning with a broken heart excitedly ran to tell the disciples she had seen and talked to the Lord.

Easter is about starting over when you thought all hope was gone, Mary learned that day. Now, it was time for the disciples to learn it.

I am convinced some of the disciples believed all hope was gone as they walked along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. There was little doubt in their minds their cowardly behavior during Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion disqualified them for future service.

So, Peter announced he was going fishing, and many feel this was not merely a way to pass the time that night, but a decision to return to life as he knew it before Jesus came his way. Peter’s plans changed the next morning, however, when Jesus appeared on the shore offering the disciples breakfast and a heaping helping of hope.

Jesus had no intention of embarrassing or condemning Peter and the other disciples for their lack of loyalty. Instead, he wanted to issue a new call at the site where he first invited them to follow him. Jesus loved them too much to let their lowest moment or biggest mistake define or destroy them.

Easter is about starting over when you thought all hope was gone. Just ask those tired fishermen.

Where are you in this story? Do you identify with Peter this morning?

When was the last time you did what you said you would never do? What did you do to disappoint and hurt someone depending upon you? How are you feeling about this?

Charcoal has a distinct odor, doesn’t it? Most of us like it because it whets our appetite for a good meal.

I can only imagine how Peter must have felt when he smelled charcoal burning that morning. No doubt it took him back to the night he stood around a charcoal fire warming his hands when people started asking him if he was one of Jesus’ disciples. Immediately, he started swearing and denying he had ever known Jesus.

I’ve never associated charcoal with guilt. I’m sure Peter did, though.

What can trigger your guilt this morning? Is it a certain odor, a song, a picture, a place or the sight of another person?

What do you do with guilt? The only effective way to diffuse it is to own up to your mistakes and repent. Ask God to forgive you and to help you make changes in your life so your biggest mistake doesn't define or destroy you.

Seek restoration and make amends for what you have done to hurt others. Work to heal the wounds you have caused and restore broken relationships.

If this is not possible, ask God to help you learn from your mistakes and chart a new course. By all means, don't roll in pity and give up. Don't let your biggest mistake define you but refine you.

Then, become a wounded healer. Find people who are struggling with their own issues and share your story, as Peter surely did. Ask God to use you to inspire and motivate them to turn their lives around, too.

Perhaps it is not Peter you identify with this morning, but Jesus. You have been betrayed and hurt by someone you depended upon like Jesus did his disciples. Someone close to you broke their promise and your heart. Like Peter, they had the audacity to do what they told you they would never do.

Can you find it in your heart to do what Jesus did for Peter and the other disciples? Can you forgive them and take the initiative to restore the relationship which had meant so much to you? Do you think you can offer someone the gift of hope and another chance?

If this story teaches us anything this morning it is that relationships are messy. People say and do dumb things. They make promises and they break promises. They let us down when we need them the most. They abandon us in our darkest hours. They embarrass and humiliate us in front of our friends and other family members.

But there is something more powerful than broken dreams, disappointment and bad memories, and that is love. With God's help, and quite frankly only with His help, can we invite those who have hurt us to chart a new course in our relationship. We can build a future based upon the mutual respect and trust needed to repair and restore a ruptured relationship.

Perhaps the Apostle Paul penned I Corinthians 13 as he pondered Jesus' gracious and redemptive response to his disciples' behavior. This was the kind of love he wanted his readers to model.

“If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

⁸ Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. ¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. ¹² For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

Whose love was this strong and resilient when you needed it most? Who loved you enough to help you rebuild your life and faith? Who did not give up on you when you gave them plenty of reasons to do so? Who came to you at your lowest moment and refused to let your biggest mistake define and destroy you?

Who loves you this much now and is trying to reach you? Who is calling your name because they want to have a candid and heartfelt talk about your future?

If you have someone who loves you this much, don't trample over that love. Don't waste the opportunity they are offering you to rebuild your life and this important relationship.

Seize this defining moment in your life and accept their challenge to start again. Run to them with a humble and grateful heart. Listen to them with an open mind.

This kind of person is rare and may not come your way again. Ask those tired fishermen.