

**The Third Day, Living the Resurrection – 2. Simon Peter**  
**John 21:3-19**  
**February 25, 2024**  
**Pastor Tami Luckhardt**

In his book, *The Third Day*, author Tom Berlin tells the tragic story of the Montparnasse Express that on October 22, 1895, departed the Granville train station with ten cars, six of which carried passengers. While the engineer left the station on time, he lost time on his way to Paris. Once he realized that he was going to be late, he accelerated the speed of the train. And he continued at a faster than normal speed even as he approached the train station. It was this day that his air brake failed, which he discovered only when he saw the station, pulled the lever and nothing happened.

The mechanical brakes were insufficient to stop the train in time and the train propelled itself over the buffers at the end of the concourse, through a two-foot-thick wall, then down the side of a two-story train station, only to land nose first on the sidewalk below. Remarkably, only one person died. The story of this train wreck became famous throughout Europe. One can only imagine the guilt and shame the engineer must have re-experienced every time a picture of the wreck showed up in newspapers or magazines.

Are there things in your past that you wish you could take back or completely undo? That car accident. Lies or rumors you've spread about another person. Something that you've taken that didn't belong to you. People you've ignored or cast aside. Hurtful things you've said that you wish, almost instantly, that you could take back. What about that affair that led to a break-up of a treasured relationship? What heavy burdens are you carrying around for which you cannot forgive yourself? Has that caused you to walk away from a relationship with God, feeling unworthy and now finding yourself making your own decisions, being your own boss, doing the old familiar things rather than placing your faith and trust in Christ? Failure can tell us that we are unworthy of that relationship and when we fail, it can be very tempting to walk away from what we failed at and go back to what we used to do. Hope fades and self-doubt and condemnation grows.

If you can identify with what I'm saying, please know that you are not alone. Some of Jesus' most devoted followers were people who struggled so deeply with these types of regrets, that they wanted to give up and go back to the way things used to be. Throughout the season of Lent, it is customary to focus on Jesus' death, our sin and need for forgiveness. Lent is the 40 days, leading up to Easter, *not counting Sundays*, and according to Martin Luther, Sundays are meant to be "mini-Easters". So, each Sunday during this Lenten season, we are celebrating "mini Easters" and focusing instead on the resurrection stories of the people who knew Jesus best, how those encounters changed their lives, and how they can impact our lives as well. Today, we are looking at Peter's story. After denying Jesus three times, he was overcome with guilt and shame and wondered if he was still worthy to be a disciple. If you are someone who has regrets about something in your past, and honestly, who doesn't, Peter's story will help you understand that new life in Christ can restore you and give you a new mission in life.

Here in John 21, we meet Peter at perhaps his lowest and most desperate moment. This chapter begins with the words, "After these things..." Sounds ordinary enough, right? Yet, it's anything but ordinary. These "things" John is referring to are the death and crucifixion of Jesus. Peter and the other disciples had seen it all; from the highs of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, to the lows of Calvary, to the glad and unexpected news of Easter morning. First,

scared to death, then thrilled with life; the unexpected new life in Christ and the confusion in the days that followed.

In light of all these *things* that Peter and his friends had experienced, Peter, feeling discouraged and hopeless declared, "I'm going fishing." So, Peter and seven of the disciples return to the shores of the Sea of Galilee (also known more widely as the Sea of Tiberius) to start over, to go back to what felt familiar and easy. But what Peter was suggesting, threatened the very purpose of the ongoing work of God in the disciples' lives. This was a sign that they were discouraged and given up all hope.

I'm not sure I blame them. I think I'd be discouraged, too. I think I would be saying, "I don't think this is turning out the way I thought it would." For three years, they walked in the celebrity spotlight with Jesus. Their expectation was not that Jesus would go to the cross to bring in a spiritual kingdom, but that he was going to overthrow the Roman Empire and bring in a social, political, economic kingdom—to restore Israel to its former glory and sit on the throne of David. And guess who they thought would be in the King's cabinet? You're right. Them! But Jesus told them that that sort of thinking was wrong. The kingdom would come someday, but first he was going to die on the cross, and they were also going to suffer. And when Jesus did die on the cross, his followers shuddered behind locked doors for fear that they, too, would be killed by the Roman government. Then they heard the word: "He's risen!" Can you imagine the hope they must have felt? *He's alive! He's coming back!*

But Jesus wasn't back, back. He makes resurrection appearances. As far as we know, he made around eight resurrection appearances: several on Easter day, at the tomb, on the road to Emmaus, in a room behind closed doors and now, now here on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Do you think you'd be a little discouraged at this point? Might your heart be saying: *I didn't think it was going to turn out like this. How about if we go back to life as it used to be, something we know about, something we can control?* No wonder the disciples were distracted. No wonder they wanted to leave that all behind, go back to what they knew and so they started fishing again.

There are times in life when no matter how hard we try to will it, even our best efforts cannot make something happen. And after a long night of casting their nets, and bringing them back empty, the disciple's discouragement was compounded over and over and over again. This reminds us of the repetition, the boredom, and the disappointment of times when we find ourselves paralyzed by our shame and guilt and we can't figure out how to move on. Feeling like a failure, having denied his friend and his teacher, Peter returned to his old life. And now, he was experiencing failure in that—what he used to do so well.

Are you familiar with the term **confirmation bias**? This is used to describe our tendency to focus on evidence that supports our existing beliefs and resist anything that challenges them. And so, we give supporting evidence more weight and credibility because it endorses what we already believe. Confirmation bias protects our self-esteem because we feel better when we believe we are right about something. But it can also work against our self-esteem when we get stuck in a negative view of our lives and listen to that negative narrative in our heads. It's when we allow our failures to convince us that we are ourselves are hopeless failures. That's what was happening to Peter.

But then the new day broke, and this man appeared on the beach. But just like with Mary Magdalene, they did not immediately recognize that it was Jesus.

The guy on the shore called out: Hey! How's fishin'?

They replied: It stinks! We fished all night and caught nothing!

Now put yourself in the disciples' place. This stranger on the beach told them to try something new—to throw their net on the other side! They were probably thinking, *Who does this guy think he is?* But you know what happened. They did as he said and when they pulled the nets back in, they were full of fish. It is here that John, first recognized Jesus, and told Peter. Peter put his robe on, climbed overboard, and slogged through the water to meet Christ while the others rowed the boat in.

One can't help but recognize the similarities in this story to the first time Peter met Jesus. We read about it Luke 5:1-11.

Jesus was teaching the crowds with his back to the sea and the crowds grew so large, they began pressing in on him. Standing in the shallows of the water, he saw fishermen nearby mending their nets. He said: Would you put me in your boat and row me out a little bit so I can finish teaching? They agreed, rowed Jesus out a little bit, he finished his teaching, and the crowd dispersed. He then turned to the fishermen, and he said: How's fishing?

They replied: It stinks! We fished all night and caught nothing!

He said: Let's ride out just a little way farther and cast your nets on the other side of the boat. When they did, the net was so full of fish that it began to break with the weight of them. At that moment, Peter fell on his face before Christ and shouted, "Leave me Lord, for I am a sinner!"

Peter was this self-assured, impetuous, overly-confident man and yet, he was so struck by Jesus' authoritative teaching—and by the Person whom even the fish obey—that he cried out as a repentant sinner. As Jesus always does when we repent, he gave not a word of judgment, but instead, a word of mercy. He said: *Peter, get up. Follow me. From now on you will no longer be a fisher of fish, but you will become a fisher of people.* Luke says that immediately Peter and the other fishermen left their nets and followed Jesus.

Here on the Sea of Galilee, we read that impetuous Peter jumped out of the boat and swam/ran to Christ. I think Jesus intentionally planned this second miracle to take Peter back to the moment of his original calling—so he would remember that moment when Christ was so compellingly real, so totally worthy of everything in his life, that he'd gave up his business and his livelihood to follow Christ. The miracle was not only to put the fish into the net, but also to keep the fish out of the net all night so Jesus could remind Peter of his original calling.

But Jesus didn't immediately forgive Peter. Instead, he set the stage for a teaching moment. Here on the shore, and John is very specific about this, there was a charcoal fire. Why is that? The word "charcoal" is only used in these two places in John's gospel. It's used here to describe this fire as well as to describe the fire around which Peter warmed himself in the courts of the high priest the night Jesus was on trial. You know how certain smells can bring back memories? Like mowed grass reminds us of summer and pine trees of Christmas time. I can't help but wonder if, as Peter ran to the shore, the powerful aroma of that charcoal fire didn't immediately bring him back to that night he denied knowing Jesus.

Peter, do you love me? Jesus was questioning Peter's allegiance, commitment, and love. It's a line of questioning that would have been uncomfortable one on one, but even more so here

because it took place in front of the other disciples. For each of the three times Peter denied Jesus, Jesus asks Peter, *do you love me?* By inviting Peter to answer the question three times, he was allowing Peter to atone for his sins. And how could Peter prove his love for Jesus? By feeding Christ's sheep, by caring for his people. Then, "follow me", said Jesus. This gave Peter a new mission in life. Hope was restored.

Hope is perhaps the most vital of all Christian virtues. Perhaps it was Peter's memory of Jesus being that source of hope in his past that propelled Peter from the boat to the shore where Jesus was waiting for him. Peter was the first to understand that we can have hope in Jesus because through the Resurrection, he is with us. He is still our Savior. He is still our Lord. Death has not overcome him. If he is present, so is his grace, his forgiveness, and his love. It was not surprising that Peter denied Christ. But what we need to remember is that the power of the Resurrection is what redeemed Peter in that moment and allowed him to reclaim his life.

And so, neither do we need to be held hostage by our past. Failure humbles us but it also teaches us. God does not define us by the worst thing we ever did. Jesus makes amazing use of flawed disciples. He continually invites us back, forgives us, re-fines us and restores us. Sometimes our worst failure might very well be something God can use in our witness in the future. So, there is nothing you have done in your past that Christ cannot overcome. He has the power to redeem your darkest moments and give your life hope again because he is the Lord of Second Chances. Jesus wanted Peter to let go of his shame and guilt. And Christ wants the same for us. He does not let our mistakes de-fine but rather uses them to re-fine us.

On the beach that morning, Jesus forgave Peter and set him out with a new mission in life where Jesus would no longer be with him physically but where his power would be fully active in Peter's life. The love of Christ changed Peter making him more humble, more attuned with God's will, and more willing to serve. In Acts 2, we see how Peter embraced the power of the Resurrection in his calling. As the Holy Spirit worked within him, Peter became a conduit for the love of Christ by performing miracles, by blessing the sick and the vulnerable, and by teaching, preaching, and baptizing people as they came to a new faith in Christ.

So your questions to ask yourself this week are: What forgiveness do I need? For what in my past do I need to forgive myself? What would Christ want me to do if I fully trusted in the power of the risen Christ in my life? Because just like Peter, the Holy Spirit seeks to work through you to fulfill your calling as a follower of Christ and lead you to discover a new mission in your life as well.

Let's pray: Loving God, we're grateful for the reminder that resurrection leads to restoration, and that restoration led to mission. May the power of Christ's resurrection lead us toward our own resurrection moments so that we may move confidently and boldly into the mission you have for each of us. We want to move forward with you in love. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

## **Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of February 25, 2024**

### **Weekly Prayer**

I come before you today, O God, seeking what you can provide. I confess that there are places in my life and in the world longing for life, waiting for your healing touch. Open my heart and mind that you may be at work in me and through me, in Christ's name. Amen.

## Monday, February 26

### Scripture: Luke 24:1-12

Very early in the morning on the first day of the week, the women went to the tomb, bringing the fragrant spices they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. They didn't know what to make of this. Suddenly, two men were standing beside them in gleaming bright clothing. The women were frightened and bowed their faces toward the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He isn't here, but has been raised. Remember what he told you while he was still in Galilee, that the Human One must be handed over to sinners, be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Then they remembered his words. When they returned from the tomb, they reported all these things to the eleven and all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles. Their words struck the apostles as nonsense, and they didn't believe the women. But Peter ran to the tomb. When he bent over to look inside, he saw only the linen cloth. Then he returned home, wondering what had happened.

### Observation

The gospels forthrightly reported that none of the disciples, including Peter, were waiting eagerly for Jesus to rise from the dead. Even when "the women" reported that two men in gleaming clothing had asked, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" their report "struck the apostles as nonsense." Peter saw the empty tomb, but only wondered what had happened.

### Application

Author Phillip Yancey, in his book *The Jesus I Never Knew*, said the resurrection accounts point toward the gospels' honesty: "Accounts of the discovery of the empty tomb sound breathless and fragmentary....the early reports seem wispy, mysterious, confused. Surely conspirators could have done a neater job of depicting what they would later claim to be the hinge event of history." What makes the essential honesty of the gospel narratives of Jesus' resurrection so vital to your faith (1 Corinthians 15:14-19)?

### Prayer

Loving Lord, when Peter first found the tomb empty, what had happened there went stunningly beyond his imagination. Open my heart and mind to trust in the unimaginably good news of the empty tomb. Amen.

## Tuesday, February 27

### Scripture: Mark 16:1-7

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they could go and anoint Jesus' dead body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they came to the tomb. They were saying to each other, "Who's going to roll the stone away from the entrance for us?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away. (And it was a very large stone!) Going into the tomb, they saw a young man in a white robe seated on the right side; and they were startled. But he said to them, "Don't be alarmed! You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised. He isn't here. Look, here's the place where they laid him. Go, tell his disciples, especially Peter, that he is going ahead of you into Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you."

### **Observation**

It seems likely that as Jesus' enemies condemned and crucified him, Peter thought his denial of Jesus would haunt him the rest of his life. Thankfully, unlike Judas (Matthew 27:3-5), he did not succumb irreversibly to despair. But Mark's story (and John 21:3, which we'll read tomorrow) do strongly suggest that Peter wasn't sure that he would ever be welcome as one of Jesus' disciples after his triple denial of his master.

### **Application**

In Mark 16:7, the messenger told Mary Magdalene and the other women, "Go, tell his disciples, especially Peter, that he is going ahead of you into Galilee." Peter three times had made a point of publicly denying that he even knew Jesus. Yet Jesus made sure his name was specifically included in the invitation to his disciples. What does this tell you about Jesus' grace toward Peter? Can you trust Jesus to treat you the same way when you fail?

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, so as not to let Peter's shame exclude him from your company, you invited him by name. Thank you for offering the same kind of personal, "nothing is too bad to forgive," grace to me. Amen.

### **Wednesday, February 28**

#### **Scripture: John 21:1-7**

Later, Jesus himself appeared again to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. This is how it happened: Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, Zebedee's sons, and two other disciples were together. Simon Peter told them, "I'm going fishing." They said, "We'll go with you." They set out in a boat, but throughout the night they caught nothing. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples didn't realize it was Jesus. Jesus called to them, "Children, have you caught anything to eat?" They answered him, "No." He said, "Cast your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." So they did, and there were so many fish that they couldn't haul in the net. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It's the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard it was the Lord, he wrapped his coat around himself (for he was naked) and jumped into the water.

### **Observation**

John 21 told about Peter and six other disciples back at the Sea of Galilee. (John did not explain why they chose to go fishing, but Bible students have ventured a variety of guesses.) Despite their past fishing experience, they were not successful on their own. (Perhaps they were rusty after following Jesus for three years.) Yet when Jesus guided them, they hauled in a huge catch.

### **Application**

In his gospel's prologue, John wrote, "The true light that shines on all people was coming into the world.... but the world didn't recognize the light" (John 1:9-10). In verse 4 of chapter 21, he wrote, "Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples didn't realize it was Jesus." When Peter did recognize his Lord, he couldn't wait for the boat to reach shore, but jumped into the water. What helps you recognize Jesus when his presence touches your life? Are you as eager to draw near to Jesus as Peter was?

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, you promised to be with me "every day until the end of this present age" (Matthew 28:20). Help me keep my heart open, attuned to your comforting, guiding presence. Amen.

**Thursday, February 29**

**Scripture: John 21:8-14**

The other disciples followed in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they weren't far from shore, only about one hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire there, with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you've just caught." Simon Peter got up and pulled the net to shore. It was full of large fish, one hundred fifty-three of them. Yet the net hadn't torn, even with so many fish. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples could bring themselves to ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread, and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

### **Observation**

John, a master of evocative images, must have meant this scene of Jesus building a fire in part to remind readers that Peter's faith "crashed" around a fire in Caiaphas' court (John 18:15-18, 25-27). It also showed that Jesus was no ghost—he was truly, physically alive. He built a fire and cooked breakfast! (See also Luke 24:36-43.)

### **Application**

John 6:11 said, "Jesus took the bread. When he had given thanks, he distributed it to those who were sitting there. He did the same with the fish." In John 21 we read, "Jesus came, took the bread, and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish." Imagine the memories this action must have triggered for Peter and the others. Think back on your own walk with Jesus. What remembered high points strengthen you for today's journey?

### **Prayer**

Loving Lord, long before you prepared this meal, the psalmist wrote, "You set a table for me" (Psalm 23:5). As I eat my meals today, remind me of the deeper ways you feed my soul as well as my body. Amen.

**Friday, March 1**

**Scripture: John 21:15-19**

When they finished eating, Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" Simon replied, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." Jesus asked a second time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Simon replied, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you." Jesus said to him, "Take care of my sheep." He asked a third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was sad that Jesus asked him a third time, "Do you love me?" He replied, "Lord, you know everything; you know I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. I assure you that when you were younger you tied your own belt and walked around wherever you wanted. When you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and another will tie your belt and lead you where you don't want to go." He said this to show the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. After saying this, Jesus said to Peter, "Follow me."

### **Observation**

Three times Peter denied knowing Jesus. His heart must have been aching, eager to reconnect. Jesus, a master psychologist, didn't want that failure to haunt Peter forever. Three times, he allowed Peter to affirm his love, deeper and more solid because Jesus forgave him after he failed. Then Jesus told him that he would yet have the chance to live out his pledge in John

13:37 (“I’ll give up my life for you”). With the cost of following clearly in view, Jesus repeated the same simple, sweeping call: “Follow me.”

### **Application**

Scholar N. T. Wright said, “The three questions correspond to Peter’s three denials. Three for completeness, yes, but three also for reminder. The smell of the charcoal fire lingers. Peter’s night of agony—and Jesus’ own night of agony—returns. But because of the latter, the former can be dealt with.” What failures might haunt your relationship with Jesus? Imagine yourself on that beach with him, by that fire. Hear Jesus ask you, “\_\_\_\_\_, do you love me?” Answer, three times, and hear Jesus deal with any barriers that separate you.

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, “Put me to doing, put me to suffering. Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee, exalted for thee, or brought low for thee.” (excerpt from John Wesley’s Covenant Prayer). Please help me live into these words. Amen.

### **Saturday, March 2**

#### **Scripture: Acts 2:1-24, 37-41**

When Pentecost Day arrived, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind filled the entire house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be individual flames of fire alighting on each one of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak. There were pious Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered. They were mystified because everyone heard them speaking in their native languages. They were surprised and amazed, saying, “Look, aren’t all the people who are speaking Galileans, every one of them? How then can each of us hear them speaking in our native language? Parthians, Medes, and Elamites; as well as residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the regions of Libya bordering Cyrene; and visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the mighty works of God in our own languages!” They were all surprised and bewildered. Some asked each other, “What does this mean?” Others jeered at them, saying, “They’re full of new wine!” Peter stood with the other eleven apostles. He raised his voice and declared, “Judeans and everyone living in Jerusalem! Know this! Listen carefully to my words! These people aren’t drunk, as you suspect; after all, it’s only nine o’clock in the morning! Rather, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

*In the last days, God says,  
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy.  
Your young will see visions.  
Your elders will dream dreams.  
Even upon my servants, men and women,  
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,  
and they will prophesy.  
I will cause wonders to occur in the heavens above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood and fire and a cloud of smoke.  
The sun will be changed into darkness,  
and the moon will be changed into blood,*



*before the great and spectacular day of the Lord comes.  
And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*<sup>[a]</sup>

“Fellow Israelites, listen to these words! Jesus the Nazarene was a man whose credentials God proved to you through miracles, wonders, and signs, which God performed through him among you. You yourselves know this. In accordance with God’s established plan and foreknowledge, he was betrayed. You, with the help of wicked men, had Jesus killed by nailing him to a cross. God raised him up! God freed him from death’s dreadful grip, since it was impossible for death to hang on to him.

When the crowd heard this, they were deeply troubled. They said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” Peter replied, “Change your hearts and lives. Each of you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is for you, your children, and for all who are far away—as many as the Lord our God invites.” With many other words he testified to them and encouraged them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” Those who accepted Peter’s message were baptized. God brought about three thousand people into the community on that day.

### **Observation**

Did Jesus’ restoration of Peter make a difference? Oh, yes! Pentecost was the Hebrew harvest festival and came 50 days after Passover. On this day of Pentecost, just 50 days after the Passover when Jesus died on the cross, God sent the Holy Spirit in a powerful way. Some skeptics claimed the Spirit-filled Christians must have started drinking early. Peter, who just 50 days earlier had feared to call Jesus his Lord even to a servant girl, now forcefully told them this wasn’t inebriation. It was God pouring out the Spirit, as promised in Joel 2:28. The Spirit used Peter’s bold preaching of Jesus as Savior to touch so many hearts that it changed the disciples from a tiny, almost irrelevant group to a movement of thousands.

### **Application**

Peter quoted some scary-sounding images from Joel: “wonders in the heavens,” “blood and fire and smoke.” He ended the quotation at the key point: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How can that message make earth’s problems less scary to you? Peter said, “This Jesus, God raised up. We are all witnesses to that fact” (verse 32). The Jerusalem authorities and Roman rulers hated that message. They might have easily proved Peter and the early Christians wrong by just producing Jesus’ dead body. But Peter knew they couldn’t do that because it wasn’t there. How does “this Jesus, God raised up” provide hope to your outlook on life and death?

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, through the Spirit’s power, the same Peter who denied even knowing you at Passover boldly preached your victory 50 days later at Pentecost. Send your power into my life, stirring me to live boldly for you. Amen.