

John 21:1-19

²¹After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. ²Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. ³Simon 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. ⁴Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." ⁶He 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. ⁷That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. ⁸But 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. ⁹When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. ¹⁰Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." ¹¹So 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. ¹²Jesus 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. ¹³Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

¹⁵When 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." ¹⁶A 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." ¹⁷He 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. ¹⁸Very 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." ¹⁹(He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

A Conversation - Two Deacons'

I have a question for you.

Shoot. I just came back from Bible study.

Good. Then you might be able to tell me.

Go ahead.

How many times does the Bible mention charcoal fires?

What kind of question is that?

Well, I take it you don't know. So I'll tell you. Exactly twice. And both of them involve St. Peter.

Enlighten me further, O wise one.

The first time the charcoal fire is mentioned is when Peter denies knowing Jesus.

Ah yes, I remember. He was outside the courtyard warming himself while Jesus was being tried. When was the second time?

At the lakeshore after the resurrection. You remember,...when Jesus was making breakfast for the disciples. There again John notes that there was a charcoal fire.

Yes. So?

That's the time when Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him. Three times He asked. Well, what the Gospel writer wants us to notice is that the threefold denial and the threefold questioning are connected. Jesus is giving Peter a chance to erase the denial.

So?

So, God is gracious. The risen Jesus reinstates Peter. He feeds Peter and then gives him a job as his shepherd, to feed the lambs and the sheep and to care for them.

Ah, I see what John was pointing out. Peter was forgiven and in spite of his denials; Jesus gave him a leadership role.

This is the third Sunday of Easter. We are celebrating the Resurrection, the **risen** Jesus. His appearance to Peter celebrates divine grace. Throughout history there has been and still is so much judgement' peoples lives crushed under its weight.

But here in the final chapter of John's Gospel, Jesus comes to his disciples where they are, on the shores of Lake Tiberius at dawn. He has built them a charcoal fire. Unlike the first charcoal fire where Peter warmed himself, in a dangerous courtyard, afraid to reveal who he really was; this charcoal fire is built expressly for the disciples, built so fish can be cooked on it. Jesus is feeding his disciples.

Three times Jesus questioned Peter's love. Can we imagine that three times Jesus looked deep into Peter's eyes and heart and soul and asked, "Peter, do you love me?" And three times Peter answered, "Lord, you know that I love you."

Filled with the smell of the charcoal fire, it wasn't until the third time that Peter, realized what was going on. At that moment, did Peter looked into the eyes of Jesus and feel the mercy, grace and forgiveness. And the last time Peter said, "Lord, you know I love you." Could there have been a smile lightening his whole face. Or, Maybe it took a while for what had happened to sink in. But we know it did sink in and that Peter went on to be outstanding.

B. Had there not been failure, there never would have been the indescribable joy of forgiveness. Had there not been failure, Peter never would have felt the burdens of his soul lifted that morning and he wouldn't have known the real depth of Jesus' love for Him and the price Jesus paid on the cross. Had it not been for the FIRE OF FAILURE there would have been no FIRE OF FORGIVENESS.

The smell of a charcoal fire would have haunted Peter for the rest of his life. But because of the FIRE OF FORGIVENESS, the smell of charcoal burning was transformed just like Peter. The smell of charcoal became sweet, bittersweet, but sweet to Peter's nose. He'd remember and feel a pang of remorse but he'd also smile a knowing smile. A smile that said, "I'm forgiven."

If we are honest, and sometimes it is difficult, we can see how we are just like Peter. We have all had those Peter moments in our lives. We've all had those moments when feel we have let Christ down when we have hidden our identity and denied being a Disciple of Christ.

I have a colleague, Ros, a retired priest in the Diocese of Montreal. She worked in the east end of Montreal and at Mile End Mission. Recently on Facebook, she

asked people to send in what they remember about her. One woman remembers her motto “We don’t do perfect”. She found those words welcoming and relaxing.

If you've ever smelled THE FIRE OF FAILURE then I invite you to take a deep breath and smell the FIRE OF FORGIVENESS. You see that's the Good News. Like Peter, we can experience the FIRE OF FORGIVENESS. That's why he came. That's why this breakfast on the beach is here, as reminder that in the Name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.

CONCLUSION:

So, the next time you go into Risky's or Railhead or Sonny Bryant's or Colter's or Red Hot and Blues, or just barbecuing in your own back yard, take a deep whiff of the smell of the smoke.

Like Peter, look across the FIRE OF FORGIVENESS into the loving eyes of Jesus and know you have been forgiven. You may have failed and faltered like Peter, but, just like Peter, now you are forgiven. Breathe deep and both remember and rejoice, because the smell of the smoke lingers with the lingering odor of your forgiveness.

This is the Word of the Lord for this day.

Peter’s Dream

The Greek word *anthrakia* (cf. the English derivative “anthracite”), meaning a charcoal fire, is found only twice in the New Testament, both times in the Gospel according to St. John.



Easter 3 C: Two Things Everyone Needs

Posted by [DJL](#) on Apr 5, 2016 in [Dear Partner](#) | [9 comments](#)

Dear Partner in Preaching,

This “epilogue” to John’s dramatic and symbolic Gospel, while perhaps not part of the “original” Gospel, nevertheless does not disappoint. Indeed, it provides a clue not only to the questions and fate of this early Christian community but sheds light on key elements of our life as disciples today.

Scholars have posited a variety of reasons for this additional chapter: questions about the fate of the “beloved disciple,” the need to rehabilitate Peter as the Johannine community moved closer to other communities more familiar with Peter’s significant role in the early church, the need to “position” this Gospel among the other stories of Jesus circulating at the time. Perhaps because of this multitude of possible motives for adding this story, there are also a variety of jumping off points to interpret it: the abundance represented by the 153 fish caught by the disciples, the similarities (and differences) to other “call” stories in the Gospels, Peter’s triple confession by a charcoal fire that erases the triple denial of his Lord and, in particular, his identity as a follower of Jesus. All of these and more may make for a vivid and important sermon.

What strikes me, however, is how Jesus in this scene offers Peter what many modern psychologists contend every one of us needs: a sense of belonging and a sense of purpose.

First, a sense of belonging. We all need to feel accepted by a larger group in order to have a stable identity and sense of self. This goes against what may seem like common sense – after all, our culture regularly posits that identity is an individual affair, something we carve out for ourselves and by ourselves. But it turns out that the gift of identity is given to us by those around us, as we see ourselves through the eyes of those closest to us. And, just so we’re not confused, belonging is different than fitting in. Indeed, it is the exact opposite (as many of us will remember from adolescence!). Fitting in is changing yourself to be acceptable to the group, whereas belonging is being found acceptable by your group just as you are. We all need to belong.

In this scene, Jesus asks Peter three times whether he loves him. Three times. Imagine if someone you care about asked whether you really love him/her not once, not twice, but three times. Painful. And Peter is, indeed, hurt by this repetition. I suspect that only later did it sink in that Jesus is not testing Peter but reinstating him to the community of believers by allowing him to confess faith the same number of times he denied faith earlier. Jesus is drawing Peter back into a community to which he belongs and accepts him for whom he is.

Second, we all need a sense of purpose, the belief that what we do matters, that if we did not show up people would notice. Purpose, as it turns out, is one of the great motivators in the world. More powerful than money or fame or power, believing that you have something of value to contribute draws us again and again into challenging circumstances with joy.

And so in response to each of Peter's confessions, Jesus responds by giving him good work to do: feed my sheep. Be a leader. Look out for these others. Devote yourself to this community. Peter is reinstated into the community of the faithful and given a sense of belonging, and then he is given good work to do and given a purpose.

Guess what, Dear Partner? This story is just one of hundreds in Scripture that do the same thing by granting us a sense of belonging and a sense of purpose. In fact, these two themes of belonging and purpose are so dominant in the biblical story that we've actually created theological language to capture them. For what else is justification – the promise that you are accepted for whom you are by God's grace alone – except the promise of acceptance and belonging? By baptism we also are invited to be a part of a group where we belong. And what else is vocation – the promise that God will use us wherever we are to take care of God's people and world – except the promise of purpose? By baptism we are called – *vocatio* – by God to make a difference in the world God loves so much.

This Sunday, Dear Partner, kindle a conversation about what everyone needs – belonging and purpose. And then tease out this story at the end of John to show how the resurrected Jesus gives Peter these two things. And then invite your hearers to see and feel that Jesus is giving us the same – an invitation into a community where we belong and a lifetime of work worth doing with a sense of purpose. And then, just for fun, read the last line of this gospel: “But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” Because, indeed, this story is not yet finished. There are so many other things that Jesus did that John couldn't imagine writing them all. And there are so many things Jesus is *still* doing through you and your hearers that the tale of them would fill all the books of the world.

Resurrection celebrates the riseness of Jesus. The appearance to Peter celebrates divine grace. The world and the church (across its history) are littered with smashed lives and vessels ground beneath vengeful, judging feet. Thus far and no further: cross the line of shame and there is no way back; impossible, Hebrews tells us (6:4-6; 12:16-17); not to be prayed for, instructs 1 John 5:16. Not so the divine initiative at Easter. The veil of death is parted; through it a hand reaches out to a Peter, shamed and probably resigned to former routines. Wherever and however it happened, Peter was turned from death to life. The God who had not abandoned Christ in death

would not abandon Peter in his. Against all odds and against the prevailing values which would later ascend to rule in much theology, God proposed love to Peter again. Almost irritated by the persistence of divine grace, Peter opens himself to life and leadership. Peter will feed the sheep. Peter will follow Jesus, as he had said. The makeshift swim suit of 21:8 has by 21:18 been replaced by the rags of death. Yes, he would follow, as once he declared he would and as Jesus challenges him to do in 21:19.

John's community must know about Peter's fate. Their hero, too, would die, though some had apparently expected the Lord's return while he still lived (21:23). That needed correction. Peter doubtless represents the leadership of the established churches with which John's communities had a close relationship but from whom they differed in a similar kind of way that their gospel differed from the others.

Peter is not disowned. Peter is legendary. His rehabilitation is a celebration of divine grace. He also symbolises leadership, the shepherd appointed by the true shepherd, to do as he did, to care for the sheep. There could be no arrogance here, no lofty superiority, no graceless dogmatism. Instead, a frail human person brought again to his feet, enriched with stories of Jesus, and brought to life and leadership by God's generosity. Such is the image and the possibility.