

Rev, Dr, Jim Gill

May 5, 2019

"Second Chance X3"

Psalm 30 John 21:1-19 Acts 9:1-20 Revelation 5:11-14

INTRODUCTION TO JOHN 21:1-13

Last Sunday we looked at Jesus second appearance to the disciples in the Upper Room when Thomas was with them. This morning we look at Jesus 3rd appearance to the disciples, but this one isn't behind locked doors in the Upper Room. This appearance takes place at the beach. Please stand and hear the word of the Lord from John 21:1-19

Let us pray. Lord thank you for this story of your seeking out those who couldn't wait to get back to what was familiar. Help us to learn from this story how much you love us and the lengths to which you are willing to go to show your love for us and to see to it that we have the opportunity to declare our love for you.. and to pass that love on to others in the way that we care for them. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

I was at a Pastor's retreat at our guest speaker was Rabbi Dan Gordon. He opened his first night address with a monologue from Fiddler on the Roof and sang, "If I were a rich man." In keeping with our passage this morning it reminded me of a conversation that Tevye in Fiddle on the Roof had with his wife Golde. I've asked Jack and Cynthia Lamm to illustrate this for me.

Tevye asked,

Tevye: Do you love me?

Golde: Do I what?

Tevye: Do you love me?

Golde: Do I love you? With our daughters getting married and this trouble in the town,
You're upset. You want out. Go inside. Go lie down. Maybe it's indigestion.

Tevye: Golde, I'm asking you a question. Do you love me?

Golde: You're a fool!

Tevye: I know. But do you love me?

Golde: Do I love you? For twenty-five years, I've washed your clothes, cooked your meals, cleaned your house, given you children, milked the cow. After twenty-five years, why talk about love right now?

Tevye: The first time I met you was on our wedding day. I was scared.

Golde: I was shy.

Tevye: I was nervous.

Golde: So was I.

Tevye: But my father and my father said we'd learn to love each other.
So, now I'm asking, Golde... Do you love me?

Golde: I'm your wife!

Tevye: I know. But do you love me?

Golde: Do I love him? For twenty-five years, I've lived with him,
Fought with him, starved with him. For twenty-five years, my
bed is his. If that's not love, what is?

Tevye: Then you love me?

Golde: I suppose I do.

Tevye: And I suppose I love you, too.

Together: It doesn't change a thing, but even so, after twenty-five
years, it's nice to know.

According to our gospel lesson this morning, some of the disciples loved ... fishing.

I heard about a fisherman who got tired of people doubting his veracity. He bought a scale and took it with him to his favorite hole. He insisted on weighing every fish he caught, just to prove that he didn't exaggerate.

Months later his wife had a baby. The doctor borrowed the man's fishing scale to weigh the baby. The doctor gasped, "I've never seen a newborn baby," he said, "that weighed fifty pounds!" 1 (Has baby Sussex come yet?)

After all the excitement of the Jesus' resurrection seven out of eleven disciples decide to go fishing. They spent the whole night and caught nothing. Jesus appears on shore and gives them directions and their nets are filled.

I love the little details that John includes. The net didn't break even though there were some big ones. John even includes the specific number of fish that were caught--153. I wonder who counted! (Just a minute....before we can have breakfast we have to count the fish: 151 152 153 ...)

But Jesus has more in his mind than how many fish they caught. Like when Jesus appeared to give Thomas a second chance, Jesus is looking for one man in particular. This morning Jesus gives Peter a second chance. Actually he gives him 3 chances to have a second chance. It's a second chance times 3. Three times Jesus asks "Do you love me?"

The truth is, sometimes it really does take three times for things to get going, to sink in and make an impact. All of us who have ever loved or been loved know that the words "I love you" can never be spoken too often. (would you please turn to someone near you and say "I love you.")

It's not enough to say "I love you" once. We must say it over and over and over again. Both the speaker and the hearer don't understand the implications of the words "I love you" until they are said and heard over and over again before we begin to trust the reality of those words and before we can feel the weight of the love that lies behind them.

Saying "I love you" out loud is an important milestone in any relationship. Do you remember the first time you said "the L word." to a sweetheart? What about promising it to a new child, - admitting it to an estranged parent, - offering it to a lonely friend,- revealing it to a rival sibling. (would you please turn to that same person again and say, "I love you.)

For those who have weathered the hurts of broken relationships, saying, "I love you," for the first time again is one of the most frightening things a person can do. Sometimes it is equally as hard to say I love you when someone asks, "Do you love me?" (would you please turn to someone else and ask,"Do you love me?)

Did you notice the name that Jesus uses when he asks that question? Jesus doesn't call him Peter. He calls him Simon. That's the name he went by before he answered Jesus' call to become a fisher of men. His given name was Simon which translates as Sandy, like shifting sand. When Simon made his confession that Jesus was the Christ the Son of the living God Jesus gave him the nick name Peter which is the equivalent of Rocky, solid Rocky. But here, after his 3 time denial Jesus takes away his nick name. Jesus goes back to Sandy Simon.

Jesus asks Sandy Simon three separate times, "Simon, do you love me?" In part, we can understand this as Jesus' way of canceling out each one of Simon's shameful denials of Jesus on the night he was arrested and betrayed. But Jesus' persistence demonstrates more than a scorekeeping of rights and wrongs. The risen Christ ties each of Simon's confessions of love for him to a thrice-repeated command -- "to feed, tend and care for my sheep."

What took Simon three times to get--and what takes all of us a lifetime to get--is that Jesus' question about "loving" and his command about "shepherding" are two sides of the same coin. Jesus is not only providing Peter an opportunity to "take back" his denials. He is showing him the way that he can best love Jesus when Jesus is no longer with him. He can love Jesus by caring for Jesus' sheep. Jesus calls Simon to move from catching fish, to catching people to caring for sheep.

Caretaking can take many different forms--and not all of them are pleasant. For every loving moment spent cuddling a new baby, there are an awful lot of equally loving but not so lovely moments spent changing smelly diapers.

Caretaking may mean that you have a place to go for coffee and conversation, but it also means being there at 2 a.m. when the phone rings.

Caretaking may mean planning a romantic candlelight dinner for two. It may mean going to a 50th wedding anniversary party...or a 47th anniversary party in the case of our actors this morning for their 47th last Friday. (Jack and Cynthia Lamm)

Caretaking, like tending, caring and feeding sheep is sometimes messy, inconvenient, upsetting and uncomfortable. It takes more than just good intentions to make the kind

of loving commitment Jesus was trying to get Simon Peter to admit to -- it takes habits.

The concept behind "habits" is that of "inhabiting" a pattern of living that is itself an expression of an inner philosophy of life. Anyone who raises livestock knows that taking care of livestock is a daily, scheduled process. It's a habitual thing. Sheep don't take a day off from being sheep. They need to be cared for every day. Dairy cows don't much care whether it is Monday or Saturday or Sunday -- 4 a.m. is 4 a.m., and they need to be milked.

Notice that in his responses, Simon is unusually humble, even demure. Once he gladly boasted of his loyalty to Jesus, even to the point of his own death (John 13:37). After denying Jesus three times, Simon now calls on Jesus himself to verify the love that he feels -- "you know that I love you."

Jesus repeats his question to Simon three times, not because he doubts his basic love for him, but in order to give him a chance to hear himself declare his love for Jesus in order to realize for himself how deep and genuine is his love for Jesus.

Some have pointed out that in Jesus' questions and in Simon's answers different words for "love" are used. The Greeks had 3 different words that translated into our English word love. Phileo is the word from filial love like love for a brother or sister. Eros is their word for romantic love like Tevye and Goldie. Agape is the word form God's unconditional love. The first two times Jesus asks Simon, "Do you love me with "agape" love-- Simon responds with, "I love you with phileo kind of love meaning, "I love you like a brother." The third time Jesus meets Simon at his level. The third time Jesus asks, "Simon, do you love me like a brother?" Simon says, "Lord you know I love you like a brother."

There is more to it though. Jesus' responds to Simon's answers with commands as "Feed my lambs" (v.15), "Tend my sheep" (v.16), and then again "Feed my sheep" (v.17). The verb translated simply as "feed" (bosko) in verses 15 and 17 could quite easily be considered "take care of" "Take care of" offers a more extensive understanding than providing food. It takes into account the nurturing relationship the shepherd has with the sheep in his care.

Jonathan Kozol has written several books about the plight of children in blighted areas in the United States. An educator of international distinction, he speaks passionately about the grotesque inequities which exist in our society today, and which are especially evident in public schools, often in the same cities.

Kozol speaks to all kinds of audiences but when he speaks to church leaders he asks for their support on behalf of children echoing the words of Christ saying,

"When Jesus said to Simon, "If you love me, feed my sheep," he didn't say only the sheep who dwell in the green pastures. He didn't say only the sheep whose mothers please us by acceptable behavior. He didn't say only the sheep whose fathers have good jobs and mothers come to PTA. He didn't say only the sheep whose parents make

smart choices. He didn't say only the sheep that have two parents. He just said, "If you love me, feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep." 2

Jill Duffield writes, "*We are more than the worst thing we have ever done. We are greater than the sum of our mistakes and misdeeds. Forgiveness is real. Reconciliation is possible. Transformation happens.*" 2

Our passage from Acts tells of another transformation and another name change. Saul was on his way to arrest more followers of the way when Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus. You may have heard someone say, "Well I didn't have a Road to Damascus experience." To that I say, "Congratulations there was only one person that was that hard headed." During Jesus ministry he performed miracles on blind men and helped them to see. When it came to Saul, Jesus made a seeing man blind. That's how stubborn Saul was. After 3 days Saul's sight was restored and he became the apostle Paul. That was an EXTREME Makeover!

It is the stories of people like Thomas and Simon who became Peter and Saul who became Paul that give people like me hope. Such radical transformation is God's doing, not ours. However, it is our role to concede that God has that power and the will to make of us more than the worst thing we've ever done, greater than the sum of our mistakes; we are forgiven, loved and freed.

We have to be willing to take risks on people deemed less than a good risk. We have to pray that others will do so for us. Through the victory won through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are more than the worst thing we have ever done and greater than the sum of our biggest mistakes. We are, in fact, we are forgiven, loved and freed for a purpose, God's purpose - maybe to be the rock upon which the next phase of the church is built, maybe to be the instrument through whom someone hears the gospel for the first time, maybe to be the one who bridges the gap between someone's troubled past and a bright future." 3

Simon goes on to spend the rest of his life loving Jesus doing that caretaking—by feeding and tending and caring for the flock. Simon not only got his name changed. He went from Simon the fisherman to Peter the Shepherd.

Simon dragged in a net of 153 fish and left them flopping on the beach. Peter took up caretaking for little lambs. So should we too take up caretaking. So should we follow his example and by doing so, answer by the way we care for others when we hear Jesus ask us, "Do You Love Me? and taking advantage of our ... second chance x 3

1. ChristianGlobe Illustrations, by King Duncan
2. Jonathan Kozol
3. Jill Duffield Looking into the Lectionary

Let's Pray. Dear Lord, how touching it is to see how far you went to make sure Peter knew that he was forgiven. In the same way that you reached out to Peter and the other

disciples we believe you are reaching out to each of us. We need to know that we are forgiven. We need to be able to cancel out our denials by affirming our love for you.

We need to know that we are needed and that we too can love you by feeding and tending and caring for one another.

You have called us together in this church through which we can demonstrate our love for you and your love for the world. May our worship not be merely by rote but doing those familiar things we learned by heart.

We pray for peace where it is not. We pray for healing where it is not yet. Especially we pray for Diana Corder as she recovers from surgery. We pray for the folks who come to our Pantry for food and give thanks for all who donate the food we dispense. We pray for the recipients of Meals on Wheels that go out from our church and those who are blessed through the Animal Food Pantry and those who deliver their food to them. We pray for all the ways that you are calling us to take care of each other and others because we have been cared for by you, Lord. These things we pray in the name of Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep. Amen.