

Jesus - The Great Physician

John 21

Do you have something you regret doing? Something, the minute you had done it you wished you hadn't.

You know the feeling, the gut wrenching turmoil that bubbles up as you realise the gravity of that poor decision. The guilt, the pain, the feeling of utter idiocy and stupidity. How could I have done that? I knew it was a bad idea, but I didn't see any other way. I was(insert adjective here) afraid, weak, lonely, bored, unhappy, feeling empty.

Then you know how Peter felt.

We are at the end of our series in John, We've seen a bit of the picture John draws of who Jesus is. Today we're going to explore Jesus final written encounter with his disciples, and his particular interaction with Peter, in John 21.

Peter was the overachiever, the first to arrive, the last to leave. The first to volunteer to help Jesus, the most eager to see him whenever he came near. The most eager to show Jesus he was the best, the most loyal disciple, the most faithful, the most trustworthy. He would win a prize at prize giving for tenacity. We see this in many moments along Peter's journey, but none more so than in how he boasts "Even if All fall away, I will not" Mark 14.29

But the rubber hits the road when Jesus is crucified. Peter is tested, and fails just as Jesus said he would. "Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times". Despite Peter's vehement reply "Even If I have to die with You, I will never disown You", we know what happened. Pride comes before a fall as they say, and Peter's pride prepares him for a rather big fall. You probably know the story. As convinced as Peter was of his faithfulness, the fear took over and he disowned Christ 3 times, to save his own skin.

In Mark 14 we see Peter's reaction

⁷² Immediately the rooster crowed the second time.^[a] Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows twice^[b] you will disown me three times." And he broke down and wept.

This is where Peter was. Totally disarray and despair at his own foolishness and pride, pain at the realisation he failed Jesus, even though he was forewarned that he would. All the feelings we were describing earlier.

So we can imagine how Peter is feeling each time Jesus appears amongst them, after his resurrection. Likely overcome with joy and awe at seeing Jesus risen from the dead, but still reeling from the poor choice. There are 3 recorded visits with the disciples in John's gospel. The first two visits, he declares "Peace be with you", called them to receive the spirit, and to go out to the mission of God. He assuages Thomas' doubt, and blesses them.

But this visit is different. He has business with Peter. Let's read through John 21

Afterward, Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee.^[a] It happened this way: ²Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus^[b]), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ³"I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told

them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

We see here, that after their encounters with the risen Jesus, they were waiting around, and so Peter Decided to go fishing. Now they could have just been hungry, but there is also a sense here that they are doing what they think is best. Jesus had said that he would meet them in Galilee, but having waited, Peter decides it's time to fish. The disciples do not know what to do, so they do that which is necessary, and in taking this initiative they put themselves in a place where Christ meets them. Here is the simple truth, that when we are uncertain what to do we should simply do our duty and God will guide.

They didn't wait around for a lightning bolt from the sky, or the audible voice of God, they went where they were told, and having nothing further to go on, used their best judgement. Not a bad idea at all. But very quickly the disciples learn an important truth, that apart from him, we can do nothing.

⁴Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

⁵He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?"

"No," they answered.

⁶He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

They had fished all night, and caught nothing. They were fishing right while Jesus was talking to them and caught nothing. This was not due to their lack of skill, it was due to their lack of Jesus. He was simply using this as an opportunity to show them that without Him present in their actions, they can do nothing. Note that he didn't say, "Come out of the water and go catch 3 sheep for us to eat" the action of fishing wasn't wrong, they just weren't doing it with him. When they followed his instruction in the things they were already doing, they succeeded.

Often we hyper spiritualise our success or failure of whether what we are doing is the right thing. Obviously if our actions are sinful that's bound to not go well, but the disciples used their good judgement and still failed.

I remember as a high school leaver, Crying out to God on my knees at the front of church, "Show me what you want me to do God" asking for some divine lighted path for me to follow. Obviously no such light came, and I did what I thought was right, spent a pile of money on a piece of paper from a university ☺. And God blessed that action and in time made it fruitful, maybe not because it was some perfect path plan, but definitely because I considered Him in my actions, and went about it with his purposes in mind.

Lets see how Peter responds to this reminder:

⁷Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. ⁸The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards.

Here we see Peter once again taking the initiative, He is intent on being the first there, despite it being quicker to probably ride in the boat, its only 100 yards away. Peter eagerness probably did him no good. And we see him do it again straight away in the next verse.

⁹When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

¹⁰Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught."¹¹So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. ¹²Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord.¹³Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Peter is so zealous toward Jesus, He goes by himself and lifts 153 fish in the sopping wet net to Jesus. I suppose it is the normal human response. After such an act of betrayal, Peter was keen to make it up to Jesus.

And isn't that out normal response. To make it up? If we disappoint our spouse, we bring home a bunch of flowers, or give them some time without the kids. If our boss hauls us over the coals for not getting a job done on time, we make sure they are watching when we work extra hard in the following days. Or when we've been naughty in front of our parents, we try really hard to be good.

So this is a bit of human natural response, as well as Peter's personality showing through. But the following conversation Peter has with Jesus shows us that Peters motive behind his zealous actions have shifted. Were as before, Peter was full of pride and boasting, we see a shift in his language in the following conversation.

¹⁵When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

¹⁶Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

17The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. 1

You notice how Peter responds. Jesus dives right in the heart of the matter. He addresses him as Simon son of John. Not the name Jesus gave him; Peter. Ouch. Jesus says right to his face, you are not the man I called to follow me, You have been going about this totally the wrong way, in your own strength, believing in your pride that you can do this without me. But he gives Peter the opportunity for redemption, "Do you love me more than these? Not just do you love me.....

Will you let your Pride shine through in this moment Peter? Will you respond saying "Yes I still love you the most! "Even if all fall away, I will not" Or have you learned something? Even when Peter failed, Jesus doesn't give up on him. He goes about restoring peter, albeit a bit painful, but necessary, and kind.

And peter responded, Yes lord, you know I love you.

You may have heard about some of the differences in the word love being used here before. But suffice to say Jesus uses a Greek work Agapao, describing a total, divine love. And Peter responds with a word phileo, a lower meaning of love, not quite as undying and complete. Both words are used interchangeably at certain points in the gospels, but there is a distinction here on purpose, once again to teach Peter, and us a lesson.

Peter is now able to see that he cannot boast about his faithfulness and love, it has already been proven that he can fail. So he uses this lower form, not as a sign of disloyalty, but as a sign of humility. Lord, I can't boast about my love of you anymore, but I do love you. He gets it. Peter is no longer concerned about being measured against the others but only to declare his faithfulness to Jesus.

But Jesus asks a second time, Do you love me? Agapao

Yes lord you know I love you Phileo

And then Jesus asks a third time, and peter gets the point, and it hurt. Just as He denied Jesus 3 times, Jesus asks three times, and peter comes to a new place of humility.

Peter, will you lay aside all your pride that drives you? Do you love me?

"Lord you know all things, you know that I love you"

And the 3rd time Jesus and Peter use the same word Phileo. They agree that loving Christ is not a contest, but just a command.

Jesus has shown Peter an opportunity to be humble. And Peter has submitted himself to that place. That must have hurt. But I find this statement from John of the Ladder, a 3rd century monk, quite explains what Jesus was trying to do.

"This is the "Joy-producing Sorrow", the repentance that enables one to experience the Lords love and salvation. Without such brokenness we are full on self and unable to hear and receive the guidance of the Chief Shepherd."

Do you remember the time you fully became aware of your sin, the pain you felt when you really came to understand how far short of God you were? This is right where Peter was, and that feeling allowed him, and allows us to fully accept Jesus as our Lord. If that's something you haven't done but want to talk more about, I encourage you to talk to one of the pastors, or someone else around here that you trust.

There is a 3rd key part to this. And it is wrapped in Jesus' replies to Peter.

"Feed my lambs"

Take care of my sheep"

"Feed my sheep"

Jesus commands us to remain in him, apart from him we can do nothing. He asks us to remove our pride and hopes of "Making it" from the equation. And then he calls Peter to a simple life of shepherding.

These three statements "Feed my lambs" "Take care of my sheep" "Feed my sheep", were said in such a way to encapsulate the full picture of the life of a shepherd. And Jesus is giving the authority or a particular kind, to Peter to shepherd his flock, the key qualification being a Love for Jesus that is characterized by humility.

For those of you at our AGM, we shared some thoughts around some of the key characteristics we want to see at OBC, discipleship being one of them, a vision of everyone disciplining someone. And here is the picture Jesus gives of that to Peter. Simply shepherding. All the parables and stories Jesus has already shared about shepherds would have been clear in their minds. Leaving the 99 to take after the one who had got away – Our call to the lost.

But also our care for the flock, for each other in the body of Christ. Not through lording over, ruling over, saying, "This is how I did it, and that's the way you should do it" but rather, soft, gentle guiding and support. Jesus gives us the opportunity, and indeed the command, to shepherd one another, to walk alongside each other. And also to go after the 1 that has left the 99.

So as we finish today, we're just going to take a moment to be silent. To ponder what Jesus' words to Peter mean for us.

Maybe it's just a simple reminder to re-centre our thoughts around him, to consider him in our daily actions, going about our normal everyday lives. Giving him opportunity and space to meet with us and guide us.

Maybe it's a challenge to lay down our pride, the things of self that drive us and our motivations, to be reminded that Loving Christ is not a competition, a prize to be won.

Or maybe it's a renewed call to go and be a shepherd, to Take care of his sheep, both inside and outside the flock.