

¹After 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."

In the synoptic gospels – Matthew, Mark, and Luke – he is depicted early on as the one selected to lead. That isn't the case in John's gospel. I'm referring to Peter. In the synoptic gospels, he is definitely going to be the leader of the disciples after Jesus departs this earth. In John's gospel, however, Peter is depicted as merely a potential leader of this small community. Perhaps among the disciples they had tried to determine who would be next in line after Jesus, and maybe Peter's name had come up. However, after the events on a particular night, any hope that Peter would be selected to lead now lay in shambles.

You know the night I speak of: upon Jesus' arrest, Peter followed him to see what would happen. As he was watching, he warmed himself by a fire – a charcoal fire, John tells us, which is an odd detail to include in the story. Anyway, warming himself by this charcoal fire, Peter is confronted by others and he denies Jesus three times. Then a cock crows. Ashamed of himself, Peter flees. Jesus and the others who were gathered in the upper room only hours earlier all heard Peter say, "Lord,... I will lay down my life for you." I'm certain those words are still echoing in Peter's head, even as he works in a boat fishing.

Certainly there is good news in the resurrection of Jesus. Peter and the other disciples are probably still processing that and its ramifications. Yet we also know they are dealing with trust issues. They had the door locked out of fear before Jesus appeared to them, and a week later when he reappeared, the doors were still locked. So do you think they are ready to trust the guy who denied Jesus? If there was any chance that Peter would be the one who would lead them, that chance is now drowned in Peter's own shame.

Perhaps that is why Peter wanted to go fishing; it was something he knew how to do and he could get lost in it. Six of the others join him. They weren't successful that night, though. Just after daybreak, a man yells from the shore some instructions to cast the net elsewhere. They give it a shot, and to their surprise an amazing catch is made. One of the disciples tells Peter that the man on the shore is Jesus, and – what is perhaps the most

puzzling verse in the Bible – we are told Peter was fishing naked, but upon hearing it is Jesus on the shore, he puts on clothes only to then jump into the water and swim ashore. Scholars have tried to explain Peter’s actions here, but in the end it is always just a very odd thing. Regardless, something about knowing the man is Jesus compels Peter to swim to him, rather than waiting for the boat to reach the shore.

Once Peter and the others finish making their way to shore, they recognize that Jesus has built a fire for them. Yet, John mentions an odd detail about this fire: it is made out of charcoal. Only twice in scripture is charcoal mentioned: here and the charcoal fire Peter used to warm himself. I imagine Peter’s shame of this memory causes a lump to form in his throat. Jesus instructs the group to get their boat settled and bring some of their fish to the fire, and it is there – after eating a breakfast of bread and fish – that Jesus says to Peter, “Do you love me more than these [others do]?”

“Yes, Lord; you know that I love you,” Peter says.

“Feed my lambs.” Then, a second time, Jesus asks, “Do you love me?”

“Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.”

“Tend my sheep.” A third time Jesus asks, “Do you love me?”

Peter felt hurt. He is reminded of the shame he has carried all these days. He is reminded of how he has lost the trust with his closest friends. He is reminded how he betrayed his promise to his teacher that he would lay down his life for him. “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” *You know the betrayal. You know that I have messed up. You know my shame. You know I love you.* The way Jesus responds could throw us off. He tells Peter about his future death, which might sound morbid. What Jesus is doing though is affirming that Peter’s original promise – to lay down his life for his Lord – will be fulfilled. Peter’s betrayal, his shame and his guilt; these things will not prevail over love. Of course Peter loves Jesus, but more important is Jesus’ love for Peter. Jesus’ love is more than able to forgive

Peter, to empower him, and to bring God's wholeness, peace, shalom to this man who has been drowning in shame.

Although today's gospel lesson showcases the resurrected Jesus, at the heart of this story is the resurrection of Peter. The cowardice that he felt, the abandonment he committed, the courage he was unable to muster; after hearing words of affirmation from Jesus, those things no longer threaten to drown Peter with guilt. Jesus gave Peter a new life. By the warmth of a charcoal fire Peter denied three times, and by the warmth of a charcoal fire Jesus three times invites Peter to allow love to prevail over shame.

By the grace of God, Peter made it to the shore, where he was encouraged by Jesus to partake in a simple meal with him. This meal didn't require a room or particular décor. This meal didn't even have a table! It was just a simple meal, offered outside – if you can imagine that – to Peter and to all others who need to know that even if they don't fully trust themselves, even if something is weighing them down and drowning them, God desires for the power of resurrection to be at work in them, here and now. What makes this meal special is not the spectacle, it is the host, because when Jesus presides over a meal, a fellowship of grace is formed. The healing and rehabilitation of our spirits take place. There will always be forgiveness, renewal, hope when Jesus invites us to join him for a meal. It all points to the persistence of God's love. It is a love that is willing to be broken and given for you.

Amen.