

I. Intro

A. One of things you study if you are after a master's degree in divinity – which has to be one of the weirdest named graduate degrees out there, but it's what most pastors study for - is counseling.

B. Pastors are expected to take several counseling classes. I did. Some find this hard to believe. Indeed, some think my counseling skills are so bad that they wonder if I could sue the school. But I had several courses in pastoral counseling. And I remember one particular moment where – in a class of fifty – the professor asked for a volunteer.

C. He had just talked about the different ways people access information from their brain, and the ways our eyes move. But he wanted to demonstrate what this would look like, and so he asked for a volunteer. And this woman – about 30 – stepped forward. And he started into a somewhat casual conversation with her in which, in response to his questions, she was suddenly very transparent (to my way of thinking, way too transparent in front of 50 people). He shut it down.

D. It helped me see what could be done.

E. And we see some of that in today's passage.

II. This is the last message in our study of John.

A. For the last three months we've been walking through Holy Week – the seven days between his triumphal entry and resurrection. The seven days during which all kinds of story lines get resolved.

B. Last week – on Easter – we were in John 20. The empty tomb.

C. In Luke's account (Luke wrote one of the other Gospels) we are told that in the 40 days between his resurrection and his ascension, Jesus spent his time helping the disciples see the big picture. "Starting with Moses, he walked them through Hebrew Scriptures explaining how it was all about him." But John emphasizes the restoration of Peter.

D. Last week we worked through the first 23 verses of John 20. In verses 24-29 we read about his interaction with Thomas (who doubted). In verse 30 John says that Jesus did a lot more than what he has written about. And verse 31 is a passage I have cited a bunch of times in this study. It is where John says: I am writing these things so that you will believe that Jesus is the Christ, trust him and gain life.

III. We pick up now in John 21, which opens with Peter saying, "I am going fishing." And the rest of the disciples saying, "We're coming with you."

A. They don't say, "we also want to fish." It appears they just want to be with him. It appears that they have bonded – they have become a team. A group of people who would otherwise not get along, now gets along.

B. One of the characteristics of the church should be that people look on and think: what does that group have in common? They do not seem like they would go together. But because of Christ we do.

IV. They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing. But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. So, Jesus said to them, “Children, you do not have any fish, do you?” They answered Him, “No.” And He said to them, “Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch.” So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish.

- A. This story should sound familiar. A similar event is recorded in Luke 5. In both settings the disciples have been fishing all night. They’ve caught nothing. Jesus – who is not a fisherman – tells them to throw their nets on the other side. They do, and they make a haul.
- B. The power of this event is found in highlighting Peter’s radically different response - which is one of the big side-stories. We see a changed life very powerfully in Peter.
- C. In Luke 5 his response to the catch is to look at Jesus and say, “depart from me.” He dreads God. He feels small, weak, exposed.
- D. In John 21, well, let me read it:

V. V7: Therefore, that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord.” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea. (Again, that’s Peter).

- A. Last time he cowered, this time he jumps in and starts swimming.
 - 1. It’s worth asking, why is Peter so anxious to get to Jesus? What did he think he was going to hear? It clearly was not, “You disappointed me. You are out.” Or, “I thought you had what it takes to lead, but you do not. I’m promoting James and John.”
- B. Let me repeat something I said last week: The only cogent response to Jesus is an extreme one. No one who figures out who he is and what he is doing says, “well that’s interesting.” The response is either: anger and fear, or to run towards him. To follow. To say – I am not letting him get away.

VI. But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish. So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish which you have now caught.” Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn.

- A. By the way, one of the things that persuaded CS Lewis to become a Christian was the Gospels themselves. As you may know, he was a literature scholar at Oxford and then Cambridge. He was a leading scholar in ancient literature. And he argues that there is simply nothing else like the Gospels. This is lost on us because we are used to novels – to stories and to a style of autobiographies that they were not.
- B. If you compare the Gospel accounts to the fiction that was written around the time that the Gospels were written – the epics, the sagas, Hercules. You see that they are radically different. The Gospels do not read like fiction, they read like historical accounts. The writings back then didn’t have details like – Peter took off his outer garment, there were 153 fish.

1. What you do not see is, “Hercules walked to the door. Sweat running down his face. The floorboards creaked.” This is not what they did. But in this account we see them! This does not read like legend.¹
2. Lewis writes: I have been reading poems, romances, vision-literature, legends, myths all my life. I know what they are like. I know that not one of them is like this. Of this text there are only two possible views. Either this is reportage... Or else, some unknown writer in the 2nd century, without known predecessors, or successors, suddenly anticipated the whole technique of modern, novelistic, realistic narrative. If it is untrue, it must be narrative of that kind. The reader who doesn’t see this has simply not learned to read.
3. Some liberal scholars – who I would argue are not being honest or have not done their homework – end up saying things like, “John says there were 153 fish because there were 153 churches in the area.”

VII. V12: Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.”

- A. Two things get mentioned here.
 1. First, in this culture, sharing a meal meant something. It was more than just food.
 2. The fact that Jesus ate fish speaks to the fact that Gnosticism is wrong.

VIII. None of the disciples ventured to question Him, “Who are You?” knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead.

IX. V15: So when 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.” He said to him, “Tend My lambs.”

- A. As a brief aside, he does not say, “Feed our sheep.” They – you and I – are Christ’s, not the disciples. And Peter gets this. In I Peter 5 he will refer to people as “the flock of God.”

X. He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Shepherd My sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “Tend My sheep.”

- A. So, this is where Jesus the Rabbi becomes Jesus the therapist.
- B. Standing between Peter and Jesus is the unresolved matter that Peter denied him three times. And this is not in the background.
- C. In Mark 17 there this odd statement, where the angels tells the three women, go “to the disciples, and Peter, and tell them that Jesus is going ahead of them to Galilee and will see them there.” The fact that Peter is singled out makes it seem as though, Jesus left instructions to make sure Peter is there! Be sure Peter knows I am alive.”
- D. Because, Peter had denied Jesus and that had never been worked through. This is not to be minimized:

1. Peter was not just one of the 12, he was one of 3. Peter, James and John and the ones who got most of the time and attention.
 2. And Peter had made a big deal of the fact that no matter what they others did, he would not deny Jesus.
 3. And in light of the comment in Mark that Peter called down curses the third time, it has been suggested that Peter had not just said that he didn't know Jesus, but in order to prove it – in that shame and honor culture, which is not what we live in – he had distanced himself from Jesus by cursing him in some way.²
- E. This is unthinkable – some would say, unforgiveable – not just to others, but perhaps for Peter himself.
1. Some of you have regrets about things you've done or not done. I sure do. And they can make it hard to live with yourself. Unless and until you own them – you make peace with how broken you are, and you seek forgiveness.
 - a) For many, the way forward is to deny these things to ourselves or to hide them from others.
- F. Jesus takes Peter down a different path. He forces Peter to retrace his steps. He almost recreates the scene.
1. Peter denied Jesus around a fire. Jesus confronts him at a fire.³
 2. Peter denied Christ three times. Jesus asks him the same question three times.
 3. Peter claimed that he loved Jesus more than the others did. Jesus asks him, “Do you love me more than these do?”
- G. It can appear as though Jesus is twisting the knife, but what he is really doing is performing soul surgery. Peter needs to face what he did, to own it and to repent. They need to talk this out. They do:
1. Notice, Peter does not make excuses. He doesn't say – I was up against it. I was tired. I was alone. I'm not responsible. I was triggered.” He is not defensive.
 2. Nor does he grovel. He doesn't make it about himself. “I'm so terrible. I'm so rotten. Everybody hates me.” Real repentance is not self pity. It's not feeling bad about feeling bad. It's all about us. It's not some transaction we undertake in order to remove the pain. Although the process does bring some pain and remorse.
- H. 2 Cor. 7:10 reads: **Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.** There are two things to note here:
1. Godly sorrow tends to be specific – it's not the kind of generic attack that is often more demonic or depression. The conviction of the Holy Spirit tends to be more specific.
 2. And when we deal with our Godly sorrow it liberates. If we do not deal with it it makes us angry or leaves us wounded. And we go overwhelmed by shame.
 3. Things get worse. That is not what we see here.
- I. Peter repents, and Jesus restores him.
1. Three times Jesus asks, Peter do you love me.

a) What he is really saying is, “Peter, you failed me.” And Peter says, “yes.” And immediately after that, Jesus says, “take care of the others.” He asks him to shepherd others. Peter fails Jesus. And Jesus says, “Yes, that was a spectacularly ugly move you made – and he repeats his question two more times. The message is: you are the biggest failure of the disciples. “Now lead.”

b) Jesus says, let’s get it all out there. I am not saying, “it was no big deal. It was a big deal. Peter, that was bad. But... I am going to overwhelm your failure – your betrayal – with my grace. I need you to lead.

J. What do you want in a leader? Someone who understand the human heart and someone who understands the Gospel.

1. When our identity is grounded in our abilities, we are fragile. It is hard to receive criticism.

2. Religious morality says: if I am strong and do everything right. God will bless me.

3. The Gospels says: only when I admit I am weak, can I see what is really going on. Can I see the truth. And can I see what God has done for me.

a) It is not strength that connects to us God, but weakness. Only to the degree that I see I am weak am I strong.

K. Peter is healed – and God can heal you. The Peter of the Gospels is sort of a loser. But the Peter of Acts is a champion, a courageous hero. He is the first to preach. He is the first to preach to Gentiles. When he prays, people are healed. became such a great leader – someone able not just to lead the church but to die for Christ, which we believe happens

1. It’s not in the Book of Acts, but there is evidence to believe it is what happens.

XI. There is some more to the text – including the famous line, found in verse 25, in which John says, **“and Jesus did a lot more than what I have written about. In fact, if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written.”**

XII. John 21 is a great chapter. So much going on. What we see here is Peter being recommissioned – moved away from being a fisherman to being a leader. Not ushered into an easy life, but a dangerous one. But one that is rightly ordered. He will move forward, not impressed with himself but anxious to share the love of God and offer of forgiveness that is found in the Gospel.

XIII.

¹ Thanks to Tim Keller for this insight. It is from a sermon he preached on John 21

² See Richard Bauckham’s commentary on Mark. (Cited by Keller).

³ I’ve heard this is the only other fire of this type in the NT other than when Peter denies Christ.