

## Sermon for April 10, 2016 – Easter 3

John 21:1-17 (NIV84)

### Theme: Fished out by Jesus.

- 1) From our sea of sin and sorrow
- 2) For the privilege of saving others.

*Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way: <sup>2</sup> Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. <sup>3</sup> "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. <sup>4</sup> Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup> He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. <sup>6</sup> He 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. <sup>7</sup> Then 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. <sup>8</sup> The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. <sup>9</sup> When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." <sup>11</sup> Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. <sup>12</sup> Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup> Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. <sup>14</sup> This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead. <sup>15</sup> When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." <sup>16</sup> Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." <sup>17</sup> The 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."*

Have you ever felt beyond forgiveness? I know that I've been tempted to feel that way and have met many others who have as well. For example, I'll never forget talking to a young man sitting in jail for hitting his infant son while high on drugs. I can't tell you how sorry he was - how much he wished he could turn back time, but he couldn't. Or what about the soldier, who killed civilians in the heat of battle. No matter what people told him to the contrary, he convinced himself that his actions were beyond forgiveness.

Was it true? Were these two guys doomed to hell forever because they committed sins that went beyond what God was willing to forgive? No, definitely not! With Peter as our example, let us learn the height, breadth, and depth of Jesus' love, under the theme: **Fished out by Jesus** 1) *From our sea of sin and sorrow*, 2) *For the privilege of saving others.*

## Part 1: From our sea of sin and sorrow

Our text takes place about two to three weeks after Jesus' resurrection. Peter was with six other disciples at the Sea of Tiberius (which is another name for the Sea of Galilee) in obedience to what the angel told the women at Jesus' empty tomb: "Go, tell [Jesus'] *disciples and Peter*, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.' " (Mark 16:7 NIV84)

Jesus singled out "Peter" as one who especially needed to come to Galilee. Why? Probably because Peter felt especially guilty for his sin of denying Jesus!

If there was one thing Peter thought he was sure of, it was his devotion to Jesus. He professed to loving Him more than anyone else: claiming that he would remain faithful even if all others fell away. But then it happened: a simple servant-girl accused Peter of being a disciple and He denied it. He didn't just deny Jesus once, but three times - taking oaths and calling down curses upon himself.

Wow, talk about betrayal? How could he continue being a disciple after that? How could Jesus ever forgive him?

I can imagine that thoughts like these went through Peter's mind as he waited to meet with Jesus. Perhaps, this is why he simply blurted out: *"I'm going out to fish."* Yes, it seems as if, even back then fishing was a way to get your mind off your problems.

*"We'll go with you."* the other disciples replied. *So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.*

*Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. He 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. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!"*

When John told him that it was the Lord, I wonder if Peter thought about the first time Jesus granted him a miraculous catch of fish after a night of not catching anything. On that occasion, early in Jesus' ministry, Peter also felt his guilt. Falling onto his knees he had said to Jesus: *"Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"* (Luke 5:8 NIV84). But Jesus didn't go away at that time. No, instead he encouraged Peter with his love and forgiveness - telling him: *"Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men."* (Luke 5:10 NIV84) Would Jesus forgive him now as He had back then?

*"As soon as Simon Peter heard [John] say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water.*

You can almost feel Peter's excitement as you read this story. Memories of Christ's mercy and love filled his mind as he swam with reckless abandon to meet Jesus.

*<sup>8</sup> The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." <sup>11</sup> Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn.*

We don't know what Peter said or did with Jesus when He reached the shore. Scripture is silent. One thing is certain, however, Peter was happy to see Jesus. When his master asked the disciples to bring some freshly caught fish, Peter does more than that: he runs back to the boat and drags to whole net of fish ashore!

*<sup>12</sup> Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup> Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.*

Jesus didn't exclude Peter from the company of disciples. He was willing to sit and spend time with him, and this gave Peter great joy.

This doesn't mean that all was well with Peter. Based on what happened next, we know that Jesus had to do some digging to both expose and dispose of the guilt that deeply rooted itself in his heart. Still, being with Jesus gave him great comfort and hope. Jesus accepted him - sinner that he was - and forgave him.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, when faced with overwhelming guilt over sin, our first instinct is to run way from Jesus - thinking that there is no way he could forgive us because we don't deserve it. But the truth is this: there is no better place for us to be than with Jesus. He is merciful in loving. His whole purpose in coming into this world was to forgive fallen mankind. His resurrection proves that all sin has been paid for in full.

And so, just as Jesus called out to Peter, so Jesus calls out to us today. Through the Gospel he invites us to come and eat at the feast of forgiveness he won for us through his sacrifice on the cross. He is not ashamed of anyone who turns to him in genuine repentance and faith. He who ate with tax collectors and sinners in the past is still willing to spend time with them - with us! - today.

When drowning in a sea of sorrow and sin, don't swim away from the Gospel net Jesus casts. Swim to it and receive the same peace Peter received: full forgiveness and reconciliation to God.

## Part Two: For the privilege of saving others

Even though Peter was happy to see Jesus, our Savior knew that guilt still lurked in his heart. In one sense Peter was right: He did not deserve to be Christ's representative on this earth. But the

truth is that no one does. It's not our love and dedication for Christ that makes us Christians, rather it's His love and dedication to us! Jesus needed Peter to know this for two reasons: 1) so that Peter would find peace and joy in his calling to be an apostle, and 2) so that Peter would not rely on himself in his calling, but on Christ's grace and mercy alone. This is why Jesus confronted Peter with 3 questions.

Now, before we look at Jesus' questions, there is something I should explain ahead of time: the Greek language has 4 different words for love - two of which are used in our text. The Greek word "agape" is translated as "truly love" in this account. It is a pure, self-sacrificing love. It is the kind of love God has for us. The other word for love is "phileo," which is a lesser "friendship" kind of love that neighbors might have towards each other.

We read: <sup>15</sup> *When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?"* In asking this question, Jesus reminded Peter of what he said on the night of his betrayal. He was so confident of his love that he insinuated that it was unmatched by any other disciple. Peter claimed that if even the rest fell away, he never would.

Did Peter actually have this kind of true love for Jesus? Peter knew his sin all too well. *"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."* In other words, Peter is saying: "Lord, you know the truth. My actions prove that I, in no way, can brag about my love. All I can say is that I love you as a friend."

Jesus accepted this answer and, in spite of Peter's imperfect love, reinstates him as an apostle. *Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."*

<sup>16</sup> *Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?"* Notice the difference in Jesus' question: He is no longer asking if Peter loves him more than the rest of the disciples. He is simply asking Peter if He truly loves him in a self-sacrificing kind of way. Peter answers the same: *"Yes, Lord, you know that I love you"* (this is, in a friendly way).

Jesus, again, accepts this response. He knows that no-one can love him as perfectly as he ought. The only reason we love at all is because he first loved us. And so again, in spite of Peter's inadequacy, *Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."*

*The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me? - that is to say: do you love me as a friend?"* This is why Peter was hurt by this last question. He wanted to truly love Jesus in the same way Jesus loved him, but He couldn't. This is why Peter said, *"Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."* - that is to say: "Gracious Lord, throughout your ministry on this earth you have experienced first hand what kind of love I have for you. How I wish I could say that it is as pure and great as your love is for me. Sadly it isn't. As you know, my love for you is imperfect. It fails but it is, nevertheless, there - all in response to your great love for me."

In spite of Peter's imperfect love, Jesus reinstated him as an apostle. *Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."*

As it happened with Peter, so it happens with us. Like Peter we love Jesus. We truly don't want to sin. And yet what happens all too often: we fall and some times our fall is hard! Could Jesus ever love us again? Could he ever forgive us?

Yes He can. He calls us to himself - reminding us of his love. As we confess our sins, he reassures us of our total forgiveness and peace we have through faith in him. Now it is certainly true that he may probe our hearts with his law just like he did with Peter. Even though the probing hurts, understand that he does it out of love. Just as a doctor wants to cut out any hint of cancer so that it doesn't come back, so also Jesus wants to cut out every hint of self-reliance from our heart. He wants us to rejoice in his perfect love for us and not in our failing love for him.

And after he cuts out that self-reliance with the scalpel of his law, he heals us with his promise of complete forgiveness. He reinstates us as his royal priests and representatives on this earth - called to declare his praise in the world.

And so, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, if you ever feel your sin is too great to be forgiven, heed Christ's call to come to him. He paid for your sin in full on the cross - and nothing can change this fact. His resurrection proves it. Heed Christ's call and confess your sin. He is faithful, loving and just. He will forgive your sins, regardless of how horrible they are. Though faith in his forgiveness you will become like Peter: a disciple of Jesus - fished out of a sea of sin and sorrow for the privilege of saving others. Amen.