

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

John 21:1-19

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."

James Harnish, a theologian in Florida, recently wrote an article reminding the world of Fred Snodgrass. (It must be admitted that Mr. Snodgrass' name has slipped from public prominence.) Fred Snodgrass played centerfield for the New York Giants and was at his position against the Boston Red Sox in the 1912 World Series with the game tied in the tenth inning. A fly ball was hit to Snodgrass and he dropped it. Sixty-two years later, his obituary was printed in the *New York Times* under the headline "Fred Snodgrass, 86, Dead: Ball Player Muffed 1912 Fly."

Is there anything more desired or less expected than another chance? A fresh start?

After a life-changing ministry, Jesus had died. A noteworthy feature of the ugliness leading to Jesus' execution was Peter, the first of the disciples, denying that he knew Jesus. Peter was in the courtyard of the place where Jesus was being held the night before he was crucified and a servant girl recognized him. But Peter denied having anything to do with Jesus. He denied him three times. Then he left the courtyard and wept over the failure that would always be remembered. If the story had ended there we might remember him with the headline: "Simon Peter, Fisherman, Denied Knowing Jesus in 33 A.D."

But Peter's story did not end with him weeping outside the courtyard the night before the crucifixion. I think a case could be made that the story never really ended at all.

After Jesus' death Peter decided to go back to his old job. He had been a fisherman and he announced that is what he would go back to. The Gospel reads, "Simon 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."

When faced with disappointment and failure the disciples said, "Remember what we did before we ever met Jesus? We spent a lot of useless nights fishing and not catching anything. Let's go back to doing that." And the security of familiar things once again overcame the hope for something better.

Just after daybreak, something happened. There was a man on the shore who wanted to talk to the fishermen about fishing. He asked if they had caught anything and they admitted that they had not. The man gave them some advice about where to throw their nets and things changed immediately. They caught so many fish they could not haul them in. Peter knew who it was on the shore. He jumped in the water and swam to meet Jesus. He was swimming toward another chance – a fresh start.

This was how his first chance had happened. Peter had been at the old routine, standing on his fishing boat washing his nets after a night of fishing that had caught nothing. Jesus suggested that they give it one more try and Peter did. They caught enough fish to break the nets and had to call their partners to help them – but Peter had the sense to be afraid. He told Jesus to go away that first time because Peter knew that the security of familiar things is no friend of hope. Peter was used to his security. But Jesus did not go away. He called a new disciple with the words "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." (Luke 5:1-11)

That is how it had all started. Peter left the boat behind and was a part of the ministry of Jesus that had taught, healed, restored, and brought the love of God into the lives of this world.

Then he denied knowing Jesus. Jesus died. And Peter went back to fishing.

It had been a powerful failure. Peter was a powerful man. He was the first among the disciples. Jesus had named him “The Rock”. For a man of that importance, his failure is also important. (In the same way, I suppose if Fred Snodgrass had been playing office league softball then dropping a fly would not have been remembered sixty-two years later. When you make a mistake in the World Series, people notice.) When *Peter* denied knowing Jesus, people noticed.

Peter was strong, possibly the strongest of all of them. But it was that strength that made him trust himself. Earlier that evening the disciples had been having their last supper with Jesus. Jesus predicted that he would be betrayed and Peter could not simply hear Jesus’ statement and pray for strength. He had to deny it, to contradict Jesus himself, to proclaim his, Peter’s, strength and undying love. “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death!” He said it and he believed it. He denied that he could be weak right up until he denied that he knew Jesus. When Peter failed, people noticed.

This failure could not be ignored. Peter was too strong and too important to the ministry of Christ to disregard. So Jesus was, once again, standing on the shore with some fishing advice.

When they got a chance to sit together, Jesus gave Peter the chance to declare his love three times. In his limitless generosity Jesus let Peter say he loved him for each of three times he had denied him. If Jesus had *ignored* all of that “denying unpleasantness” there could have been no future. Jesus had to walk into Peter’s life and drag him away from his return to the security of his routine. He had to listen to Peter’s declaration of love before he could renew Peter’s commission and tell him to proclaim the Gospel to the world.

Jesus showed his contempt for security by showing how cheaply it could be bought. You find security in catching fish? You can catch enough fish to break your nets anytime. My church is created for more than security. Feed my sheep. Nourish the people around you with the news that God loves them. Encourage them to do more. Teach them new things. Show them new possibilities. Walk right into their secure, routine lives and tell them they can be more.

Peter went back to the security of his fishing boat and, I suppose, hoped to be ignored for the rest of his life. Being ignored would not overcome his failure, but it would keep it from hurting as much – sometimes.

Jesus had higher expectations for Peter.

Jesus has higher expectations for us, too. This morning, we are surrounded by people who are not here. They have found security in various places. (Ironically, many of them are quite likely on fishing boats.) To the extent that they have thought about God at all, it is possible that they are hoping that he will ignore them. Peter hoped the same thing. If God ignores us, or at least does not expect much of us, it will not overcome our sin, but it will at least make it hurt less – sometimes.

But we are here to worship God. And, in his endless generosity, Jesus gives us the chance to worship and declare our love so that he can overcome the times we have denied him.

Jesus gives us the chance to declare our love to undo the times we have denied him. Whatever part we might play in the ongoing crucifixion of Jesus, he continues come out of the tomb and into our lives. He continues to call us to worship him.

This world crucified Jesus; that was as conspicuous as sins can get. But we are not called to mourn a crucified Christ; we are called to follow a risen Christ.