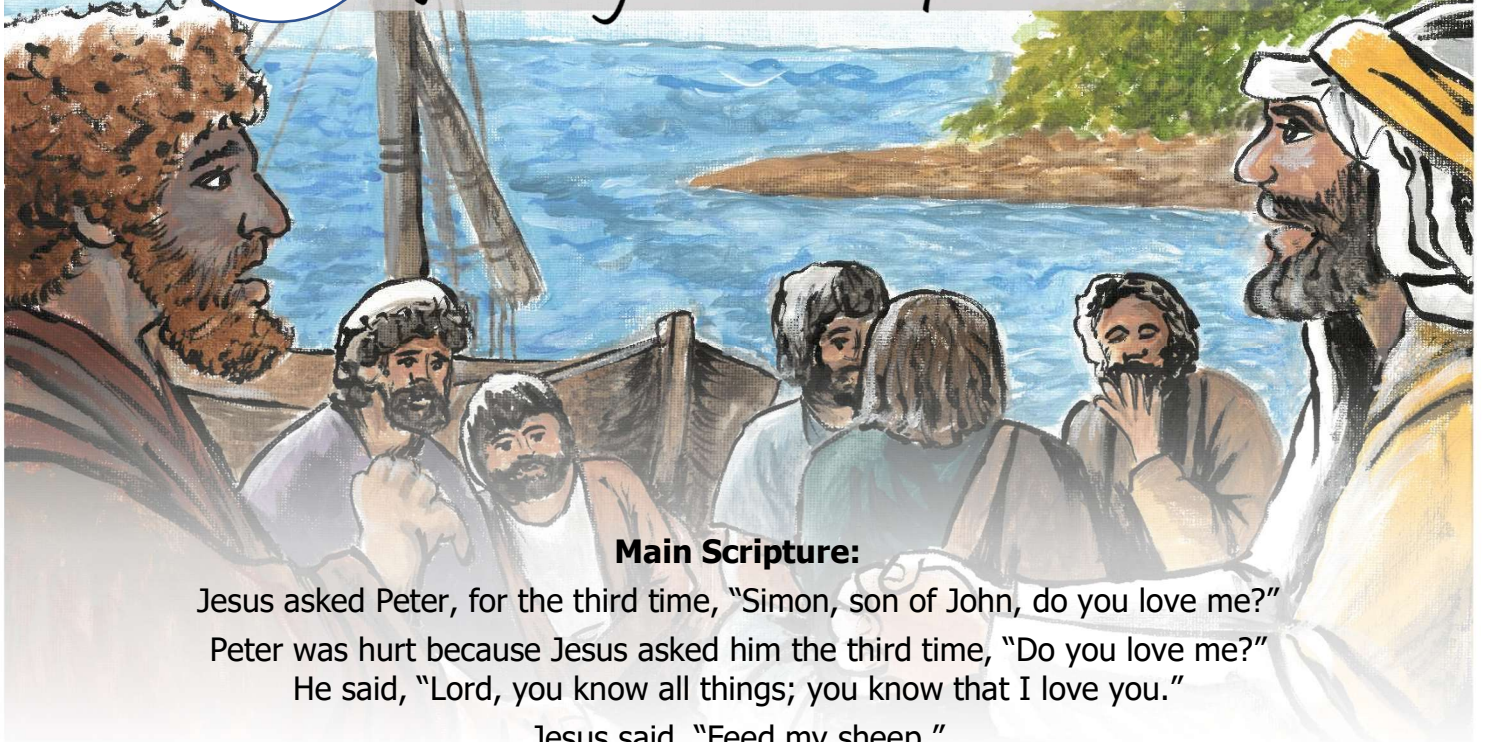




3rd Sunday of Easter

God's story never ends in failure



Main Scripture:

Jesus asked Peter, for the third time, "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."

(John 21:16-19)

Main Point

Peter failed miserably when, three times, he denied knowing his friend and Saviour.

We're told that he wept bitterly. But Peter's failure did not mean

Jesus sacked him from his mission team.

Instead, Jesus reminded him that from great failure comes important lessons.

Now Peter would serve Christ, not in self-confidence and prideful boasting,
but with confidence founded on Christ alone.

Intro |

After our Resurrection service I was a bit bothered that I forgot to include some of the conversation I had with the Police Officer as we were waiting for their investigation to be completed after our break in.

I spoke of my annoyance to Juleen, and she wisely reminded me that the Lord would certainly offer another opportunity to share the story.

Well, today is the day! It just so happens that the conversation aligns remarkably well with today's passage.

We were discussing the fact that the assailant had actually visited our church a few months before and was assisted with food and clothes from the Boutique.

The Police Officer asked, "so does your religion impact how you would treat the guy if he came back and asked for more help?"

I explained that yes, our Christian faith deeply impacts how we treat people who hurt us or bring us harm. Jesus asks us to show compassion, forgiveness and mercy to everyone, even those who, we know, may harm us in the future.

On Resurrection Sunday we asked, 'what difference does Christ's resurrection make in our everyday life'.

Well, today's passage answers that question.

Not only does Christ's resurrection completely change how we respond to scoundrels like the assailant who broke into our beloved Bazaar.

But, Christ's resurrection teaches us how Christ responds when we really stuff things up, when we fail, and when we hurt those around us.

We see this truth lived out, quite vividly, through Christ's short conversation with Peter.

We've all been where Peter was after Christ's crucifixion.

We've all failed – some of us in more graphic ways than others. However, if we are honest with ourselves, we all know we fail over and over again.

We know how the world treats those who fail – they're mocked, laughed at and then cast on the rubbish heap, and labelled as a lost cause.

But, today, we learn that Jesus responds to our failure in a radically different way.

Let's see how.

Point 1 | Christ knows about our failures, before they occur, and always has a plan to redeem, restore and reinstate us into his service

If we go back before the resurrection, we'll remember that Jesus sat with his friends and told them about all that was about to happen.

Jesus told them that he was going to be betrayed, and they wondered which one would do the dirty deed.

Then the discussion turned into an argument about who was the greatest (Luke 22:7-30)

At this point, Jesus told Peter that Satan had asked to "sift him as wheat" or 'break him down' (see Amos 9:9) to such a degree that he would fail. But thankfully, Jesus told him he had already interceded on Peter's behalf. Although his faith would fail, he would go on to strengthen his brothers. (Luke 22:31-32)

Peter found the whole suggestion outrageous, and bragged about his preparedness and courage, saying, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death." (Luke 22:33)

But, as we know, Peter did indeed deny his Lord and friend.

When Jesus was brought before the high priest, and Peter's third denial escaped his lips, we're told, Jesus turned and looked straight at Peter (Luke 22:61).

So, something very personal had gone down between Peter and Jesus – a personal betrayal had occurred and the fellowship of an intimate friendship had been broken.

I wonder whether it was the hurt in Jesus' eyes, or the knowing look that said, 'is this not what I foretold' that broke Peter?

Regardless, when he realized what he had done, Peter went outside and wept bitterly (v62).

We don't know where he went on Saturday. But, if he is anything like any of us, he would have been so crushed and ashamed, he hid from everyone.

I'm sure doubts got the better of him: "I've blown it. I'm not worthy of being called a follower of Christ. I am a traitor, like Judas. How can I show my face to the others ever again?"

It surprises me, therefore, to read that by Easter Sunday, Peter was actually *with* the other disciples. Even if he had gone into hiding on Saturday, something pulled him toward re-joining the group because he was there later on Sunday.

I wonder whether it was because of the two remarkable incidents that happened as dawn broke on that Resurrection morning.

Point 2 | After failure, Jesus restores by calling us personally and gathering us for his kingdom work.

No matter how many times I read the resurrection story, my heart delights when a new dimension of the story is discovered.

I want to share with you two of these new discoveries.

When the women arrived at the tomb early on Sunday morning, they were met by an angel who announced the good news. The angel instructed them to "*go, tell his disciples and Peter*" (Mark 16:7).

Isn't it interesting that the angel singled-out Peter?

Could it be that Peter needed to be found by the women, and brought back because the angel had told him that Jesus was personally looking for him?

Without a doubt, the reference "and Peter" re-identifies him as one of Christ's followers.

But there is another gem of a discovery in the story.

And this is a mystery that theologians have pondered for years.

If you'll notice on our stations of the resurrection, at station 5, the first of Jesus' appearances is to Mary at the tomb (Mark 16:9). Then, the next appearance, which most likely occurred in the afternoon is when the two travellers encounter a stranger on their way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-16).

But did you know there is another appearance that doesn't have a station?

How many of you knew that Jesus made a special, personal appearance ... to Peter?

We don't know where or when precisely nor do we know how long the meeting lasted. But twice the New Testament mentions that the meeting took place.

"It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon" (Luke 24:34 also see 1 Corinthians 15:4-5).

Doesn't it warm your heart to learn that Jesus came to see Peter, before he met with the rest of the disciples. Aren't you glad about that? Jesus not only calls for Peter, He meets with him before he meets with the others.

Point 3 | After failure, Jesus reinstates by calling us to rely on Him, rather than our own resolve and self-confidence

Now we come to John 21. It is evening on the Sea of Galilee, not long after the Resurrection. Peter and six other disciples have spent the night fishing and end up catching nothing. In the morning a man calls from the shore, telling them to put their nets on the other side of the boat and they will catch fish.

They end up with so many fish, they can't haul the net because it was so full. When Peter realizes the man is Jesus, he impulsively jumps in the water and begins swimming for shore.

The whole incident reminds us of Luke 5:1-11 where Jesus tells Peter to go out into the deep and let down his nets for a catch. Despite his doubts, Peter follows Christ's command and ends up catching so many fish, they filled up two boats.

After the breakfast was over, Peter and Jesus take a walk together. This is the part of the story most of us know best.

Jesus asks Peter three times, "Do you love me?"

I could spend another sermon on Jesus' question and how he uses the word 'love' as it changes each time.

But this was a deeply, intimate conversation and it gave Peter the opportunity to hear that his Lord and Saviour *knew* him, his successes and failures and he still wanted him on his team.

I encourage you to notice the comparison between the man who had been so boastful, so sure of himself, so confident of his own courage, who said, "even if all fall away on account of you, I never will" (Matthew 26:33)

... to the man who finally answers, "Lord, you know all things." (John 21:17)

Every trace of self-confident boasting has disappeared

In the Upper Room, Peter thought he knew himself, but he didn't.

Now, he doesn't even trust his own heart; instead he trusts in the Lord who knows all things.

This is a mighty step forward in growth. It is a sign of maturity when you can say with conviction, "My trust is in the Lord alone."

Sometimes we have to hit bottom and hit it hard before we can say those words. But from the bottom of the pit comes new purpose and courage.

Just a few days later, on the Day of Pentecost, fully restored, Peter stood in the temple courts and preached a mighty gospel sermon to the very men who had crucified the Lord (Acts 2:14-40). Three thousand people were saved that day.

The old Peter was gone forever. A new man was born.

Finally, a note on why the conversation turns towards Peter's death (John 21:18-19)

Early church tradition says that Peter was crucified upside down in Rome because he said that he was not worthy to be crucified in the same manner as his Lord.

In the Upper Room Peter had rashly boasted that he was willing to follow Christ to prison and to death (Luke 22:33).

It's as if Jesus tells him, "You were right about that. Someday you will have a chance to keep your promise. And I know that in that day you will not fail." The early historians tell us that Peter lived and died faithful to Jesus to the very end.

So, what does Christ do with failure? He redeems, restores and reinstates us!

Application | The second chance Saviour calls us too

So, may none of us be heard saying, 'well that's it! It's all over, there is nothing left for me to do.' Neither, "I've stuffed things up too much to do anything good in the future."

Rather, let us find ourselves in God's restoration of Peter.

Jesus called Peter, the 'rock', yet there were often times when he seemed very un-rocklike. In fact, it took repeated failures to produce rock-solid character in him. But Jesus never gave up on his man.

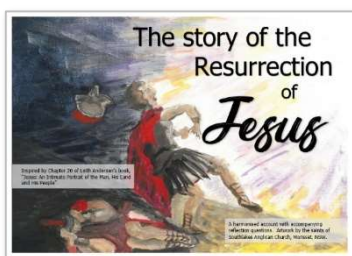
From beginning to end, Jesus believed in Peter more than Peter believed in himself.

And so it is for all of us.

All of us need to know that though we fall again and again, by God's grace, and the power of the resurrection, Jesus will always redeem, restore and reinstate us.

What mercy! What grace! May our hearts be open for Jesus to do his transformative work in our lives.

Easter to Pentecost Devotional



The story of the Resurrection will act as a devotional for the season of Easter to Pentecost Sunday. You may download a copy of the book from the Church's website or watch the story in video form at:

www.southlakes.org.au/wayofresurrection page.

To reduce the cost of printing, please ask the Church office if you would like a printed copy of this devotional.