

## YOU'RE THE ONE I LOVE

Dr. David A. Renwick  
National Presbyterian Church  
April 19, 2020

This morning I'd like us to think about mercy and second chances as we think together about the resurrection appearance of Jesus to Simon Peter, his closest follower, and some other disciples beside the Sea of Galilee -- the lake in N. Israel where they had been fishermen before they'd begun to follow Jesus 2-3 years before.

This is an appearance that takes place a week or two after the first Easter, after the initial excitement of the resurrection has died down. And we know this timing (more or less a week or two after Easter) because of the story in the previous chapter in which Jesus also appears to one of his friends: the one named Thomas

This is how the story with Thomas goes in John Ch.20 . . .

24 Thomas, one of the twelve, was not with the rest of Jesus' disciples when Jesus came (on the first Easter Sunday). 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

26 A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."

28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Now one of the interesting things about this story (to me) is that the resurrection is clearly portrayed as something that is in some way "physical" -- but not just!

- On the one hand, the door to the room where his disciples are is shut -- but Jesus is suddenly there on the inside!
- On the other hand, Thomas says "I need to SEE" . . . and when Jesus appears he complies: he says "Reach out and TOUCH ME and LOOK AT MY HANDS and SIDE (his wounded hands and side).

But that's not the only point of interest to me at least. What's of interest as well, is the mercy shown towards Thomas by Jesus. That is, Thomas doubts the reality of the resurrection and becomes known in history as "Doubting Thomas." He's a skeptic; it's not easy for him to believe; but Jesus' loves him anyway -- Jesus doesn't say "Tough luck, Thomas! you missed your chance the first time! Bye Bye!" But, instead, gives him a second chance.

And the Bible is filled with second chance stories for those who mess up, whether -- deliberately, or -- because of lack of faith or human weakness as well as for those who are "just slow to get their act together"

For example . . . there's

1. Abraham -- who offered to give his wife away when he was scared Jacob -- who lied to and cheated his father and brother
2. Moses -- who led a futile rebellion and killed a man Samson -- who squandered his strength with Delilah
3. Jonah who ran away the first time, when God asked him to do what he didn't want to do; and even the 2<sup>nd</sup> time, Jonah did it grudgingly!
4. Esther -- who needed a forceful nudge to her conscience to give her the courage to use her royal power to save her people
5. Mary, Jesus' Mother -- who wanted Jesus to stop his teaching and healing -- and come home when his public ministry began
6. Two sisters, Mary and Martha who berated Jesus!!! -- for not coming sooner when their brother died
7. and Paul the Pharisee who persecuted and put to death some of the first followers of Jesus

None of these are what I'd call "plastic saints with cheesy grins" But, rather, they're all very human, down to earth; portrayed in Scripture "warts and all."

And this is true not only of Thomas but it's also true of Jesus' friend, Simon Peter, as well -- who (as we saw a few weeks ago when we looked at the story of Jesus' arrest and trial) saved his own skin by denying that he had ever known Jesus at all. Not just once, But again and again; three times! Not that he was completely self-serving or spineless

In fact, while all his friends ran away at the moment of Jesus' arrest, Peter actually had the courage to follow Jesus from the Garden of Gethsemane to

the place of his trial in the home of the High Priest. But when the moment came in the High Priest's courtyard, when Peter was standing beside a charcoal fire, warming himself, and someone suggested that he was a follower of Jesus, fear and weakness (perhaps mingled with weariness) won the day. And even though Peter knew within a few days (by the end of "The Good Friday weekend") that Jesus was alive again, the wound in his conscience had to be painful and profound: he'd promised he'd never fail Jesus – BUT he did! And to add to that . . . when the risen Jesus appeared again to Peter and his friends, beside the lake Jesus made it worse! Not only did Jesus find Peter back-pedaling: leading the other disciples to take up their former profession of fishing as if their ministry for Jesus was over, but Jesus chose to stand on the shore of the lake . . . . RIGHT BESIDE ANOTHER CHARCOAL FIRE! – a not-so-subtle reminder of Peter's terrible moment of denial back in Jerusalem (these are the only two uses of the Greek word *anthrakia*, charcoal fire, in the whole of the Bible, and the repetition and proximity are unlikely to be coincidental).

This is how John tells the story in the early part of Ch. 21: (let me use selected verses)

v. 3-6 Simon Peter said to his friends, "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.  
v. 9 When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread.  
v. 12 Jesus 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. So here is Peter in front of a charcoal fire . .

Welcomed by Jesus, to be sure; but also reminded graphically by Jesus of his past. And then to make matters worse, Jesus brought up the denial AGAIN -- by specifically and pointedly Asking Peter THREE TIMES: "Do you love me?"

And Peter GOT THE MESSAGE! -- The third time, it hit home, and really stung. Let me read again at v.15:

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?' Peter said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.'

16A SECOND time Jesus said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend my sheep.'

17 Jesus said to him the THIRD time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' And then we read: Peter felt hurt because Jesus said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' And who could blame him? -- It was like an arrow directed at his heart! And Peter replied to Jesus, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep. (*And, even if it involves hardship, as Jesus indicates it would*) FOLLOW ME!"

So there's this niggling of Peter by Jesus; the stirring up his bad memories. And it seems to be deliberate. Which begs the question "WHY?" To which I think the answer is this:

That what Jesus wants Peter to know is that "The Peter" Jesus wants -- is not the strong and perfect Peter, but Peter AS HE IS . . .

Jesus wants the Peter who at times (not all the time) is weak and fearful and repeatedly puts his foot in his mouth! The Peter who wrestles with his faith and doubts and fears; all in a crazy mix.

THIS is the one whom Jesus calls into his service and onto his team. An act of sheer grace and mercy! A second chance: given not grudgingly, but lovingly, and truthfully, as if to say "It's you I love . . . as you: no one else, but you." OR, to co-opt the late Fred Rogers' words:

It's you I like, (LOVE)  
The way you are right now,  
The way down-deep inside you  
Not the things that hide you,  
Every part of you.  
Your skin, your eyes, your feelings  
Even when you're feeling blue  
It's you I like, you yourself . . . It's you.

And with all his needling (so common in his teaching throughout his ministry), this was what Jesus passionately wanted Peter to know, and understand, and embrace.

Though to begin with, for a moment or two at least, Peter couldn't take it! Not the needling or the reminders – But the mercy, the grace, the sheer love.

Sometimes mercy can be hard to receive: and you can almost see Peter drop his eyes in shame, and then deliberately deflect the attention onto one of the other disciples. Do you remember what happens? Let me read again from John 21:20 . .

20 Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; he was the one who had reclined next to Jesus at the supper and had said, ‘Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?’

21 When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, what about HIM?’

22 Jesus said to him, ‘If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?’

In other words, Jesus is now speaking more explicitly: Someone else’s life is none of your business! Forget the rest of the world at this moment. IT’S YOU I WANT. You’re the one in focus; as if there was “no one else.” Sheer Grace . . But . . . as with the Jesus we read about in the Gospels “before the resurrection,” the “post-Easter resurrected Jesus” always ties his grace in with a call to trust and serve.

And Jesus is quite specific.

- He says to Peter twice: Follow me! (literally: “YOU follow me!”) (words used over 20 times in the Gospel)
- And to Peter three times: “Take care of my sheep, my lambs – my people.

And adds: no matter what the cost. Find the people you need to care for: AND DO IT!! – whether we feel like it or not!! DO IT!

And **for all of us**, in a sense, the call is the same: Find the people you need to care for: And DO IT! Family, friends, church or colleagues. As we’ve been loved, we need to love, whether we feel like it or not!

**German martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer** (1906-1945) once observed about Jesus’ grace that it was free but not cheap . . . he writes in his book, The Cost of Discipleship, pp 45-49:

Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of the Church.

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance.

Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again and again.

Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. (*DR: It’s a privilege!*)

It is costly because it costs us our life (*DR: Jesus was clear – he expected everything from Peter, nothing less*) and it is grace because it gives us the only true life. (*DR: What Jesus calls “eternal and abundant” life; 3:16; 10:10*).

Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: “you were bought at a price,” and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us.

This is what Jesus gave to Peter . .

- i. Mercy, Forgiveness, a Second Chance. Nothing was hidden from Jesus and he loved Peter anyway
- ii. and a Call – that would cost him everything, but that would also give him the life and the purpose for which he had been created.

The same second chance, of course was offered to Thomas, wrestling with his questions and doubts. **And the same FOR EACH OF US as well . .**

Did you notice Jesus’ parting jibe at the end of the story on doubting Thomas? Let me say it again: Jesus loved to needle people, to get under their skin until they grow in faith.

He says in John 20:29 – “*Thomas, Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen AND YET HAVE COME TO BELIEVE.*”

A little dig . . But it points beyond Thomas to you and me!

**We** are those who have not seen – and yet have been called to believe.

Friends, let him love you.

Let him needle you, get under your skin! YOU!

As if there was no one else!

He wants you in his family.

He wants you on his team.

No matter what you’ve done.

Or where you’ve been.

Or where you are.

Nothing in the world matters more.