



July 14 & 15, 2018  
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## *Life on the Water: Feed My Sheep*

John 21:15-19

Good morning Chapel Hill. I'm Pastor Bill. We are in a summer series we're calling "Life On The Water." Today we're going to listen in on a difficult conversation Jesus had with Peter at the Sea of Galilee.

Difficult conversations are not bad. They can be extremely useful. They sometimes feel awkward because they often involve correction and nobody enjoys being corrected. But correction can spur growth and God is all about our growth. Right?! He loves us too much to allow us to stay the same! Amen!

I can't tell you how many times over the years I've meditated on Hebrews 12:5-6

"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son/daughter." Heb 12:5-6 (NIV)

I remember brooding over this passage after my first assignment out of seminary. I was "gun-ho" about church planting after taking Peter Wagner's course at Fuller Seminary. I guy named Rick Warren was having success planting a church in Southern California. Why couldn't others of us do the same? Jenny and I took the church planter's assessment from the EPC and passed and we were "off", partnering with the EPC and Church Resource Ministry. About a year and a half into the venture I came across Proverbs 19:2 in my devotions:

"It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way."

When I read that passage I realized I was in "over my head." I was long on "zeal" but short on "knowledge." We were ill-equipped and underfunded so we decided after two years to "pull the plug," "cut our losses" and move on. God graciously opened the door for me to return to ministry several years later.

This morning we're looking at the apostle Peter's restoration to ministry in John 21:15-19.

"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."

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.'

The third time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?'

Peter was grieved 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.' I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"  
John 21:15-19 (NIV)

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

### **Prayer.**

In John 20 Jesus revealed himself two times to the disciples after His resurrection. In John 21 Jesus revealed himself a third time. Seven of the twelve were hanging out at the Sea of Galilee and Simon Peter said "I'm going fishing." James and John thought that was a good idea since they were also fisherman so they all joined Peter in the boat. It's what they knew. It's what they were familiar with. It's the way most of them made their living. So they went out, got in their boat, fished all night and caught nothing. Zippo.

At daybreak Jesus stood on the shore watching the disciples but they didn't recognize him. Jesus said, "Friends, did you guys catch any fish?" "NO." So Jesus said to them, 'Cast the net on the other side of the boat, and you will find some.'

One of the great miracles of the story is that the disciples actually listened to what Jesus told them to do and they cast the net on the other side of the boat. No small feat. The nets were heavy and they were tired after fishing all night and who the heck is this guy telling us how to catch fish! But they did and immediately their net was full of fish! So full, in fact, that they couldn't haul the net into the boat.

And then the light bulb went on for John! He calls out to Peter "It is the Lord!" When Peter heard this he jumped into the water in typically exuberant Peter fashion, and swam to shore to see Jesus, leaving the others to drag the net to shore.

On the beach Jesus had a little fire going. He was cooking up filet of fish sandwiches for his friends. Oh, and by the way, there were 153 LARGE fish in the net. Wow! That's a lot of fish AND a lot of money! That's a little detail John throws in which makes sense to me because John was a fisherman. That catch made quite a bit of money for them. And they'd be telling that fish story for a long time.

Jesus said, "Come and eat!" None of them dared ask, "Who are you?" because they all knew it was Jesus. Not accidentally John writes,

“Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them...”

Undoubtedly the disciples remembered back to their last meal with Jesus...when they ate dinner and broke bread together. Then everything started happening really fast...Jesus' arrest, Peter's denial, Jesus' physical suffering and crucifixion...

I wonder what those seven disciples talked about with Jesus over breakfast? We don't know. John doesn't tell us. The text says “None of them DARED ask him “Who are you?” They very well could have sat there silently. It was probably a wee bit awkward because there was some unfinished business that needed to be tended to. Peter's denial needed to be addressed. But Jesus didn't have the hard conversation in a way we might expect.

Jesus could have stated the obvious, “Peter, you denied me three times, and the rest of you fled when I was arrested. But I forgive you. Now get to work and feed my sheep.” But Jesus doesn't do that. He focuses on Peter, because Peter is the ringleader and his betrayal was greater than the rest.

So Jesus asks Peter three times “Do you love me?” giving his impetuous disciple three chances to reverse his three denials of Jesus.

I think what is important to observe is Peter's heart attitude after Jesus asks him the third time, “Do you love me?” The text says:

“Peter was grieved 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.’”

I imagine in that moment that Peter shed a tear or two. John says, “Peter was grieved...” He was deeply saddened that Jesus asked him three times “Do you love me?”

I think Jesus asked the question three times because that was how long it took for Peter to demonstrate a contrite heart. It was that sincere remorse that Jesus was looking for in Peter.

Possessing a contrite spirit is critical in ministry. You may be the most gifted minister in the world, but if you're not broken, if you're not humble, God can only use you so far. Brokenness is more important than degrees and pedigrees. James says that “God exalts the humble, but humbles the exalted.”

I remember the Holy Spirit impressing upon me Psalm 51:17 during different seasons of ministry:

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart O God you will not despise.”

Sometimes you may think that what God wants most from you is your money and your time. I don't think that what he desires most from us. What God desires most from each of us is a humble, surrendered spirit....“a broken and contrite heart O God you will not despise.”

I like the Message translation of Psalm 51:17

“Going through the motions doesn’t please you, a flawless performance is nothing to you. I learned God-worship when my pride was shattered. Heart-shattered lives ready for love don’t for a moment escape God’s notice.”

There was something about the place Peter was in at that moment, knowing full well that he had denied Jesus three times and utterly betrayed His Master that Jesus knew he was now prepared to shepherd the church going forward.

In that moment Peter could have said or thought, “No Lord, I am totally unworthy. I have disqualified myself from ministry. You can’t use me anymore. I’m too broken. I’m too bad. My mistakes have been too great!”

But Jesus doesn’t go there, and Peter doesn’t go there either.... nor should we! If you ever think you have acted in such a way that you are disqualified from ministry, or are unworthy of serving the Lord, know for certain that is a lie from the enemy! You may need to repent and ask for forgiveness; you may experience a season of discipline from the Lord, but God always wants to keep us walking on His path and doing his bidding.

The truth is none of us is worthy to serve the Lord. We’ve all said things or done things that have not honored God! But God says, DON’T GIVE UP! I’m not done with you. I want to restore you! Keep at it!

Jesus keeps it simple with Peter. He says if you love me feed my sheep.”

That’s what I want you to do. Don’t wander around in a wasteland of whoa is me look at what I’ve done!” Get your eyes off yourself and onto me and feed my sheep.

Notice that Jesus uses the word “lamb” first before “sheep.” Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep. We know how Jesus loves the little children! Right? Maybe he was thinking about the little children first when he was talking to Peter.

So how are we called to apply this passage to our lives?

We all have sheep to feed! The question is, do you know who is in your flock?

In Deuteronomy 6 God says to the Israelites,

“Hear O’Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. *Impress them on your children.* Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”

If you’re a parent or a grandparent, your job is to spiritually feed those sheep in your flock! Pray with them. Teach them the Word. Impress upon them the “things of God.” If they’re wandering, pray for them daily. Cry out to the Lord on their behalf. And let the Hound of Heaven have at them!!

Here’s what else is true: Sometimes God sends little lambs our way to be fed and cared for. But you may be caught unaware and not realize that Jesus sent them to you! You might think to yourself,

"Please go away. Why are you bothering me? Your problems are too much for me? Why are you taking up so much of my precious time? Can't you see I'm busy? I'm too tired for you." And we push away the little lambs that God sends our way.

Churches stop growing sometimes when they stop caring for the lambs God sends their way.

Years after Jesus talked to Peter and the disciples at the Sea of Galilee, Peter wrote a letter to church leaders about caring for God's people. He must have had in mind his conversation with Jesus when he wrote this. He writes:

'Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care – not because you must, but because you are willing as God wants you to be...being examples to the flock.'

Mexico Story: During the last Men's Mexico trip we met a woman named Olivia. She was the director of the Rehab Ministry in Ensenada. We built a second story room for them while we were there. But what was amazing was her story. She has three recovery centers in Ensenada including one with twenty women in her own house! Her heart was as big as the ocean! She became a Christian only six months ago and now she is inviting Christian groups to come in to minister to the folks in recovery and many are becoming Christians. God keeps sending her more sheep because she never turns them away! The police will drop people off to her because they have nowhere else to take them. God sends his little lambs to people and places that will take them.

We all have little lambs or adult sheep in our lives that need care and feeding. Do you know those assigned to you? Do you have some strays God is sending your way?

Or maybe today you are in that place that Peter was at the Sea of Galilee. Maybe you've been "sidelined" from ministry because of something that's happened in the past and you need to get "unstuck."

We have elders and prayer team people who would love to pray for you however the Spirit is moving in your life today.