



The Rest of the Story
Message Notes, November 20, 2016
John 21: 1-19

John's gospel seems to come to a close at the end of chapter 20, but reminiscent of a Ronco commercial – "Wait, there's more!" – Chapter 21 may have been added later. If so, it was added *soon* after, and all known manuscripts of John's gospel contain chapter 21. Whatever the case, this story is authoritative, true and important. God moved on John's heart to tell this "rest of the story" of Peter's restoration from his denial failure.

Weeks ago, we examined the night of Jesus' arrest. Pastor Keith compared and contrasted the failures of Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial: Both men followed Jesus; both men failed that night; both were deeply sorrowful. But Judas turned to the uncaring Pharisees for resolution and ended up dismissed and isolated, and took his life in despair. Peter stayed connected to the disciples, his family of faith, and this sustained him through his shame and sorrow.

There is a difference between simply surviving a failure and rising above it. This is the rest of the story – the story of Peter's full restoration.

Try to imagine the mixture of emotions Peter is feeling since his Lord's resurrection – excitement and joy, but also shame and self-loathing for his denial of Jesus. A true approach-avoidance scenario: "I want to be near the Lord I love, but I am so ashamed. I have blown it! There's no place for me now in His mission. I'm going fishing; that's familiar and comfortable." And so he does, and several of his buddies join him.

They spend all night on the water, but catch no fish. An unfamiliar voice from the shore suggests a net-toss on the other side. Why not? Suddenly it is teeming with fish, the net nearly breaking. That unfamiliar voice becomes very familiar to John. Impulsive Peter puts aside his ambivalent emotions and dives in, tunic and all, and swims for shore.

Jesus has already prepared breakfast; he invites them to join him, especially Peter. This is the moment Peter has dreaded – a face-to-face with Jesus, no way to hide his shame. But Jesus is lovingly ready to address his failure, not with reprimand but with restoration. Jesus has even prepared "a fire of burning coals" for the fish. The Greek word here is used in only one other place in scripture – for the fire Peter stood by in Annas' courtyard when he first denied Jesus.

True forgiveness feels the full pain of a wrong done and also requires that the offender fully own his failure (confession). Forgiveness is no light, casual dismissal of an offense. The stage is set for restoration:



“Peter, do you love me more than these?” There are various speculations about this phrase:

- Did he mean “more than you love these comrades/brothers”? Unlikely that Jesus would press a comparative love here.
- More than this fisherman’s life? This idea is certainly viable.
- More than these other followers love me? This holds much potential. It hearkens back to Peter’s bold, prideful assertion that *he* would never abandon Jesus, even if “all these others do” (Matt. 26:33).

Jesus again gently exposed Peter’s pride. Peter receives this and gives a simple, humble response. “Lord, you know I love you.” His restoration begins with humility.

Two more times, Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love me?” With the third time, Peter is hurt (this is cutting deep into his failure and shame), but pain is not Jesus’ objective – restoration is! With each inquiry, Jesus is giving Peter the chance to reverse his former denial with an affirmation of love. And following each of Peter’s affirmations of love, Jesus re-instates Peter to his mission – “Feed my sheep/feed my lambs.”

Jesus is saying, “I still believe in you Peter. You are *not* disqualified from the name I gave you, ‘The Rock.’ I have work for you to do. Don’t get stuck here in your weakness and failure; you are more than simply forgiven. I am restoring you. Reinstating you. Recommissioning you.”

The “rest of the story” continues to unfold as this restored disciple grows into a bold evangelist of the Gospel, an apostolic leader of the church, an author of several biblical letters. The dramatic transformation of Peter’s restoration is well-revealed in his letter to other leaders of the early church:

“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers – not because you must, but because you are willing ... eager to serve Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another because ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up I due time” (1 Peter 5:2-6).

Whatever your weaknesses or failures, can you hear Jesus ask you the most important question, “Do you love me?” Our humble “Yes, Lord” to this question is the beginning of restoration, empowerment and a life of devoted service.