



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER, MAY 4, 2025
ACTS 9:1-6; PSALM 30; REVELATIONS 5:11-14; JOHN 21:1-19

SHAME CONQUERED BY RESURRECTION

To make sense of the end of today's Gospel, we must go back to Good Friday. On that day we heard John's Passion. It's night, they are in Jerusalem and Peter is warming himself at a fire in the courtyard of the high priest while Jesus is being interrogated inside. A woman asks Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" Peter, "I am not."

Today's Gospel takes place at dawn, on the beach on the Sea of Tiberius. The Risen Jesus asks, "Peter, do you love me?" Peter answers, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus says to him, "Feed my lambs."

Back to Good Friday and the dark courtyard – "Are you not one of his disciples" Peter, "I am not."

As the sun is rising on the beach Jesus asks, "Peter, do you love me?" He says to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus says, "Tend my sheep."

Back to Good Friday and John's passion, "Did I not see you in the garden with him? And again, he denied it with an oath, 'I do not know the man!'"ⁱ

And today, "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."

Can you imagine the guilt and shame Peter felt when encountering the Risen Lord whom he denied three times? Peter may have even asked himself whether his denials contributed to Jesus' death. The complicated, wounded Peter had returned to his fishing boat after Jesus was crucified. Isn't that what we all do when we're ashamed? We retreat to whatever is safe, comfortable, and familiar. We run headlong towards something -- *anything* -- that will help us feel competent and worthy again. Peter flees to his boat, his nets, and the vocation he had before Jesus called him to a new one. As if there is some time or place in his life where shame is not. Where his wound is not. Where Jesus is not.

What I find both searing and instructive in this story is the way Jesus saves Peter by returning him to the source of his shame. He doesn't avoid the hard conversation. He doesn't pretend that Peter's denials didn't happen and didn't wound. But neither does Jesus preach, condemn, accuse, or retaliate. He feeds. He feeds Peter's

body and then he feeds Peter's soul. He surrounds the self-loathing disciple with tenderness and safety, inviting him to revisit his shame for the sake of healing, restoration, and commissioning: "*Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? Feed and tend my sheep.*"

He not only feeds Peter, but Jesus entrusts others to his care.

Jesus' appearance to Peter, like all the post-resurrection appearances, speaks volumes about God's priorities. They aren't ours. They certainly aren't the priorities of our country or our world. In the days following the resurrection, Jesus doesn't waste a moment on revenge or retribution. He doesn't storm Pilate's house, or avenge himself on Rome, or punish the soldiers whose hands drove nails into his. Instead, he spends his remaining time on earth feeding, restoring, and strengthening his friends. He calls Mary Magdalene by name, and she cries. He offers his wounds to the skeptical Thomas. He grills bread and fish for his hungry disciples. He heals what's wounded and festering between his heart and Peter's.

In other words, Jesus focuses on relationship -- on reconciliation -- on love. He spends the last days before his ascension delivering his children from fear, despair, self-hatred, and paralysis. He wastes no time on triumphalism or smugness. Even at the height of his power, he chooses humility. He chooses to linger on a lonely beach till dawn, waiting for his hungry children to realize how much they need him. He chooses to ask Peter an honest question about denial, even though the answer

might hurt. He chooses to feed and tend his sheep.

Peter's shame meets Jesus's grace, and Jesus's grace wins. That's the Gospel story in a nutshell. As writer and research professor Brené Brown puts it, "shame cannot survive being spoken." Meaning, shame cannot survive the living Word. Shame cannot tolerate the resurrection. When shame encounters the God who is Love, it burns to ash and scatters.

¹ This dialogue cycles between John 18: 17; 25 and the current Gospel, namely, John 21: 15-19. Matt 26: 72 is quoted, "I do not know the man!" for homiletic effect.

John 21:1-19 [Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. 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. Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." He 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. That 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. But 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. When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." So 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. 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. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. When 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." A 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." He 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. Very 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." (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."]



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