

John 21:15-17

S Love Restores

S Repentance

Love, repentance and restoration are the theme of our passage in John chapter 21 this morning. In chapter 18 Peter failed Jesus when it appeared Jesus needed Peter the most. Peter compounded his fearful behavior by denying Jesus three times. Yet Jesus loves Peter and knows Peter was grieved by his denial. Jesus also knew in Peter's heart he loved Jesus and had given into fear.

B This passage of scripture, John 21:15-17, gives both Peter and us great encouragement. For the outcome is beyond what Peter could have hope for. Like Peter when we sin, we rightly know that we lose our intimacy with the Lord. This is because Jesus is holy and we are not and sin separates us from the most holy God. Sin is a barrier between us and God and this is why He sent Jesus to die for our sins. Through Jesus we are able to be in the presence of God, who is holy. So even though we are in ruin by our sin God comes to us and He gives us a promise, He says **S** *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" (1 John 1:9) As soon as we recognize we have sinned, we need to confess and repent so that God will cleanse us. This is demonstrated in our scripture passage in John. Jesus will seek out Peter. Peter was sitting at the fire next to Jesus, verse 12 reveals, *"None of the disciples dared ask him, 'Who are you?' They knew it was the Lord."* I believe Peter was feeling the heat of un-confessed sin not the warmth of the fire.

S Self-Reliance

To understand our passage this morning we need to first examine Peter's fall. Peter's fall was caused by self-reliance. Many of us may sin in the same way as Peter believing in our own abilities instead of relying on Jesus.

Let us journey back to the upper room where Jesus in teaching the disciples as He prepares them for His arrest, crucifixion and resurrection. Jesus has just told the disciples that where He is going they cannot come. Jesus continues saying in John 13, **S** "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. **35** By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35) This commandment to love one another means caring for other Christians, serving other Christians and placing the needs of other Christians above your own. **B**

Jesus wanted the disciples and He wants you and me to serve with humble hearts. In spite of Peter having recognized Jesus as the Son of God he is not humbled by Jesus command to love one another. Peter responds, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." (John 13:37) Jesus had just taught the disciples the need for humility and that they should serve by His strength and power, but Peter boasts how he will serve by his own power. Jesus looks at Peter and gives him truth that must have been hard to hear, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times." (John 13:38) When I have had this same misdirected conversation with God thinking somehow I can serve Him, somehow by my strength I can help Him and by helping God I will prove myself worthy. When I have had a conversation with God along these lines I have had difficulty hearing

what God was telling me because of my pride.

Peter just could not put aside his own feelings of worth and pride to listen to Jesus with an open mind. As they are walking from the upper room to the garden where Jesus will later be arrested, Jesus is informing the disciples that His followers will be scattered when He dies even though He will rise up from the dead. He tells them He will also go before the disciples to Galilee where our study passage this morning takes place. Here amid this crucial teaching recorded in Matthew, Peter interrupts saying, *“Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.”* (Matthew 26:33) Can you hear Peter’s boastful pride? Peter is saying he will never fail even if the other disciples fail. He is saying he is not the average person for he will be faithful no matter what comes. *“Jesus said to him Peter, “Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.”* (Matthew 26:34) Once again Jesus tells Peter in front of all that he over estimates his own abilities, that he lacks humility. Peter just cannot help himself because his thinking is about himself, and not listening to Jesus. In Matthew 26, *“Peter said to him, “ ‘Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!’ And all the disciples said the same.”* (Matthew 26:35) Satan uses Peter’s self-reliance to convince Peter he is unworthy and to doubt Jesus’ love for him. Sadly, I, like Peter, have not always taken to heart that Satan cannot place a claim on those who belong to Jesus and have been filled with doubt.

When we study the gospel accounts they all tell us that Peter denied Jesus three times. If we are to learn from Peter we need to ask in our heart of hearts, “How have we denied Jesus?” We are to be humble and confess our sins, repent and Jesus will forgive and He will lead us to understand how we must be dependent

on Him and let Him direct us. Only then can we move away from our pride and sin that places distance between Jesus and us. Peter fell through pride and fear, placing a wall between himself and Jesus. Peter is incapable of restoring himself and seeking Jesus. But, now here at the Sea of Galilee, Jesus comes to Peter.

S Restoration

Peter's restoration has two parts. First, Jesus questions Peter three times to prompt his awareness of his dependency on Jesus and second, Peter's humble response. As we examine these, ask yourselves how they apply to you in your relationship with Christ.

B The first thing we note is how Jesus addresses Peter as he questions him beginning in verse 15, **"Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"** It is significant that Jesus uses the name Simon that Peter was known by before he met Jesus. Simon means "one who has heard." As a Jew he had heard the word of God, but did not know Him. Jesus had changed Simon's name to Peter, which means "rock." As Peter the "rock" he will hear and believe in Jesus. But, Jesus went back to the old name Simon, to remind Peter of who and what he was before Christ.

When I am frustrated, by the pain of my sin, or shocked by my disobedience to Christ, I take my mind back to who and what I was before Christ and that gives me a strong dose of reality. But, it also, gives me courage, for I would never want to go back to the Bill before Christ. It humbles me as I see who Jesus has made me – yes, I have a long way to go, but I have come so far, it truly makes me eternally grateful to God and it emboldens me to be more, more through Christ. I know to

be more of what Christ wants me to be I can only grow in that direction by His power – I must surrender. How about you? How are you doing at surrendering to Jesus?

Peter had come to believe he was the “rock” because of his own strength, not because of Jesus. He still had to learn he would be the “rock of Jesus” only when working under Jesus’ power, not his own. Have you ever found yourself in this situation? You have begun to think that the strengths of character Christ has developed in you are yours and not His? If so, you will fall just like Peter. The question for you and me is, “When we sinned did we repent and learn?” Are we leaning on our own strength less and living through Jesus’ strength more or are we still full of ourselves? Think this through – I did this week and I was not satisfied with the answer. If you seriously meditate on this you may find you still have too much of yourself, just as Peter did.

The impact of verses 15 and 16 is somewhat lost in our English language. Let me read these verses and add definition. **15** “When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me (*Jesus uses agapao or agape meaning to love completely and unconditionally*) more than these?’ (*Probably refers to the other disciples*) He Peter said to him Jesus, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ (*Here Peter uses the word phileo meaning fondness or brotherly affection*) and Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my lambs.’ **16** He said to him a second time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Tend my sheep.’ ” We know God is the only One capable of “agape” love that is unconditional. Peter is recognizing that he is not capable of the same type or level of love Jesus has for him. Jesus

has a total, complete, unconditional love for Peter and this is the reason He is seeking Peter out to restore him. Peter is humbled and must admit he is only capable of phileo or brotherly love. Jesus' agape love for Peter is complete and unconditional and this is true for all who God the Father has given Him. We know this by what Jesus said in John 3:16, **S** "For God so loved (*agapao*) the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." Jesus' question is designed to show Peter he is not capable of the level of love he thought he was. **B**

Peter had said in Matthew that because he loved Jesus more than the other disciples, that he would never fail Jesus. That morning as they sat around the fire on the shore of the Sea of Galilee Jesus looks Peter in the eye and asked, "Simon, son of John, do you love me (*Simon Peter do you have agape love for Me?*) more than these?" Peter had boasted that he loves Jesus more than the other disciples. Had his behavior proved this to be true? No. Peter responds the only way he was able, having been humbled by his denial of Jesus. Peter says, "No, Lord, I love you with a lesser love, a 'phileo' love."

Jesus asks a second time in verse 16, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Jesus mercifully drops the comparison between Peter and the other disciples in this verse. **He Peter said to him Jesus, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.'** **He Jesus said to him Peter, 'Tend my sheep.'** " Jesus is saying, "Peter I have a complete love for you and you are right to recognize your limited ability to love me in return."

Are you at this point in your relationship with Jesus? Are you able to admit as

Peter did that Jesus loves you completely, without limits? Do you recognize your limits? If you do, then when you sin, you will know that what Satan wants you to believe is a lie. Jesus loves you so completely He will never stop loving you and He will restore you. As a simple comparison, we parents restore our own children when they fail. We may correct them, discipline them, but we do so because we love our children.

Jesus is showing Peter that He loves unconditionally and He is questioning if Peter is able to love Him back with phileo love. Peter says, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus is saying, “Ok, Simon now that we established your limitations I will help you grow spiritually and prepare you to lead people to believe in Me and plant churches in My name.” In fact, Jesus predicted in the scriptures that Peter would be the foundation of His church. Peter along with the other disciples will established the Church of Jesus Christ. Recorded in Matthew we read, “**He Jesus said to them disciples, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ 16 Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ 17 And Jesus answered him Peter, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.’**”

(Matthew 16:15-18) This brings us to this very morning, here as we worship, we are the church founded by the disciples. History has proven what we know is the truth of the Bible; the remnant Church cannot be destroyed by Satan. The question before us is the same as was before Peter; “Do we love Christ and are we His Church?” The answer is “Yes,” but it is by the power of Jesus that enables us to be the remnant Church. This is the greatest promise.

Jesus has chosen to build his church with you and me, redeemed sinners. Even though Jesus knows your deepest and darkest sins. I am glad I do not know all of your sins and I am equally glad you do not know all of mine. It would make it so hard to love one another for we have only phileo or conditional love. The Bible teaches us, “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8) Jesus has complete and unconditional love for every believer – He loves each of us warts and all. As the church of the living Christ we are given “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. **35** By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35) How can we live up to this commandment of Jesus? We can only love each other by trusting Jesus and surrendering to Jesus and living by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Just as Jesus told Peter you have fallen short, we fall short also, but remember **S** “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.” (Mark 10:27) Jesus will work through us, He has chosen undeserving people; Peter, the disciples, you and me, to be His ambassadors of salvation to the world and when we surrender to Him He will work through us as He did through Peter. **B**

We continue with verse 17, “Peter was grieved because he Jesus 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.’ ” Why did Jesus ask Peter a third time? The answer is related directly to Peter. When Jesus asked the third time it hit home and Peter was grieved as he realized Jesus was asking for the third time because he had denied Jesus three times. But Jesus does not stop


here and leave Peter with no hope because of his denials. Jesus says to Peter, **“Feed My sheep.”**

S Right Response

The final thing we need to give our attention to this morning is Jesus command to Peter, **“Feed My lambs”** and **“Tend My sheep.”** Jesus is being so very gracious toward Peter. From our perspective we might expect Jesus would rebuke Peter for his failure. We might expect Jesus to say to Peter, “You have failed Me and I have no room for failures.” Jesus comes to Peter and humbles him and then tenderly and mercifully restores Peter. This enables Peter to respond rightly. Jesus is so unlike us. Jesus always wants the best for us. On the other hand when someone fails us we rarely have a desire to see him restored.

B My dad was a person who was very loyal to those he considered his friends. But, if you ever did my dad wrong you were no longer his friend and hell would freeze over before you would be forgiven. When my dad was dying of cancer he came to know Jesus as his Lord and Savior about six week before he died. We were talking and I told my dad what a blessing it was that God was letting him die of cancer instead of a car crash or a heart attack because it gave him time to repair some broken relationships before he died. My dad was infuriated with me and wanted nothing more to do with me, so I left. I prayed for the Lord to touch my father’s heart. The next day when I arrived to see him, my dad was in tears and said I had touched a nerve, but I was right and that he knew the Lord wanted him to forgiven people. Over the next few weeks my dad had a number of visitors that he had not talked to in a long time and healing took place. This kind of

change and restoration and love only comes from Jesus. Peter received this love and restoration from Jesus. You have received love and restoration from Jesus. Who have you given the love of Christ to? This is what Jesus did with Peter and this is what Jesus does with us; He heals us so that we can bless others in His name.

Jesus had told Peter and the other disciples in Luke chapter 5 that they would be catchers of men or fishers of men as Matthew and Mark put it. They would become evangelists. But now Jesus is telling Peter that he will have a responsibility beyond catching men, beyond being an evangelist. Peter is to 
“Feed *my* Jesus’ sheep.”

What is the requirement for one to “Feed *my* Jesus’ sheep?” Is it moral perfection? I certainly fail in this category and if this were the requirement; there would be no teachers. Is it an academic degree? All of the disciples and writers of the New Testament fail in this qualification with the exception of Paul. Is it the ability to raise money to build a Church complex? Obviously, I along with the disciples fail if this is a requirement. Is it the ability to bring Christ’s kingdom into the world? We have seen this morning we do not possess enough love or power to make this happen. There is only one requirement and that is to love Christ as much as we are able, to place Christ above all that is in this world and when we do this, the desire to serve Him and share His gospel and teach His Word will create a love within us that will burn hot for others.

Do you love Christ? Then feed His sheep. This deep love of Christ does not get caught up in and nor is it measured by mystical experiences, but is a love that

cares more for others than self. John the Beloved wrote in his first epistle, **S** “By this we know love, that ~~he~~ *Jesus* laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the ~~brothers~~ *(brothers and sisters of the Church)*. **17** But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother *in Christ* in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? **18** Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.” (1 John 3:16-18) If we love our Lord Jesus Christ the natural fruit of this love will be the outpouring of His love for those who Jesus died for and we will serve them. You and I are the Church, as God asked Isaiah and asks us this morning, “ ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ Then † *Isaiah* said, **S** ‘Here I am! Send me.’ ” (Isaiah 6:8) God said to Isaiah and He says to you this morning, “Go.” Will you answer, “Here I am! Send me.” Go, my beloved, feed upon His Word, the Bible, so that you may feed others the truth and love of Christ. Christ has given us a command, the same command He gave Peter. Will you be obedient to Christ? Will you love Him enough to serve His chosen? Will we feed and tend His sheep? If we are obedient, then, we need to “Go” with the love of Christ and feed His sheep. If each one of serves our brothers and sisters, then no ones needs will go unmet. So let us go and feed Christ’s sheep with His love.