

Memory verse: “Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord.” Psalm 27.14

A Dramatic Reading of John 21

Narrator: Simon Peter, Thomas (nicknamed “Twin”), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the brothers Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. Simon Peter announced, Peter: I’m going fishing.

Narrator: The rest of them replied, “We’re going with you.” They went out and got in the boat. They caught nothing that night. When the sun came up, Jesus was standing on the beach, but they didn’t recognize Him. Jesus spoke to them...

Jesus: Good morning! Did you catch anything for breakfast?

Narrator: They answered, “No.” Jesus said...

Jesus: Throw the net off the right side of the boat and see what happens.”

Narrator: They did what He said. All of a sudden there were so many fish in it, they weren’t strong enough to pull it in. Then the disciple Jesus loved said to Peter, “It’s the Master!” When Simon Peter realized that it was the Master, he threw on some clothes, for he was stripped for work, and dove into the sea. The other disciples came in by boat for they weren’t far from land, a hundred yards or so, pulling along the net full of fish. When they got out of the boat, they saw a fire laid, with fish and bread cooking on it. Jesus said...

Jesus: Bring some of the fish you’ve just caught.

Narrator: Simon Peter joined them and pulled the net to shore -153 big fish! And even with all those fish, the net didn’t rip. Jesus said...

Jesus: Breakfast is ready.

Narrator: Not one of the disciples dared ask, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Master. Jesus then took the bread and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus had shown Himself alive to the disciples since being raised from the dead. After breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter...

Jesus: Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?”

Peter: Yes, Master, You know I love You.

Narrator: Jesus said...

Jesus: Feed my lambs.

Narrator: Jesus then asked a second time...

Jesus: Simon, son of John, do you love me?

Peter: Yes, Master, You know I love You.

Narrator: Jesus said...

Jesus: Shepherd My sheep.

Narrator: Then Jesus said it a third time...

Jesus: Simon, son of John, do you love Me?

Narrator: Peter was upset that Jesus asked for the third time, “Do you love Me?” so he answered...

Peter: Master, You know everything there is to know. You’ve got to know that I love You.

Of all of Jesus' disciples, Peter seems to have got it wrong... his heart was engaged by Jesus, but his understanding of Jesus was at best, shaky. Peter was so human, so impulsive, so well-intentioned... and often so wrong. What are the most memorable things about Peter? That he loved Jesus and betrayed Jesus? Is it also memorable that Peter was a man of courage? We know his story: that when Jesus was arrested, Peter renounced Jesus, cursing, and furiously vehement in denying that He knew who Jesus was. Peter was a liar, and a traitor. It's hard to see or to imagine that Peter was also a man of courage.

I would guess that after Jesus was crucified, no one felt more guilty and bereft than Peter. After Jesus' death His disciples were afraid, and gathered together behind closed and locked doors. It was probably even more frightening and disorienting that some of the disciples claimed to have seen Jesus, alive. It was Peter who decided to leave the closed and locked rooms, and the other disciples went with him to their boats to fish. Six of the men went with Peter, back to those familiar waters... remembering that they'd met Jesus on the beach, remembering that He'd promised to make them fishers of humanity. It was a quiet and depressing night on the lake; the disciples were heartsick and there was nothing to catch.

As the sun came up the disciples saw the Risen Christ on the beach, cooking breakfast. They *knew* it was Jesus and they were *afraid* that it was Jesus. Their hopes and the optimism and dreams of God's coming kingdom had died with Jesus on the cross. They were afraid, now, to hope, to believe that they were seeing the Risen Christ. It was silent on the boat. No one was brave enough to ask, "Who are You?" Except for the disciples who said, "It is the Lord!" And except for Peter, who didn't wait for confirmation: he knew. He knew it was Jesus. Peter jumped into the water to get to Jesus as fast as he could. He had the courage to jump in the water and rush towards Jesus because he knew Jesus. He'd experienced love and understanding and compassion and forgiveness with Jesus, and that allowed Peter to take a flying leap overboard and run through the tide to Jesus. When he jumped overboard Peter responded to the love he'd experienced with Jesus, and he found the courage he'd lost.

Who among us can't relate to Peter, to his blundering and sometimes shaky faith, his dense and slow understanding, and also his love and devotion for Jesus? Peter's impulsive, broken, sinful self is all of us. I love it that Peter is a biblical role model for discipleship, because we can all relate to him. The story of Peter holds a key, a secret if you will, to discipleship and to faithful courage. It's that in God's kingdom nothing is unredeemable.

There are Christians who use the word "unforgiveable" and there are Christians who sharply divide what God will and will not tolerate. But throughout scripture, and here in Peter's story, we see that every time people jump into the water to get to Jesus, He is there, and He welcomes us with love and mercy, with the intent to heal and redeem us. Peter had done the "unforgivable", hadn't he, in denying that he knew who Jesus was. In the hour of Jesus' greatest need He'd been abandoned by everyone. They all ran away, except for Peter, who stayed nearby and he told lie after lie after lie that he knew Jesus. Peter made a mess of his relationship with Jesus. I can't think of anyone who would forgive Peter, or continue a relationship with him, after he

abandoned Jesus, left Him to face torture and death alone, and swore a “blue streak” that he didn’t know who Jesus was.

I can’t think of anyone who would welcome Peter into their presence, as Jesus welcomed Peter that morning on the beach. Jesus welcomed Peter and the disciples and invited them to eat breakfast with Him. Jesus had a fire started, the coals ready, and He called to them, “Come friends, and bring some of the fish you’ve just caught.”

After breakfast Jesus took Peter aside... I think they strolled down the beach to have some quiet time. I think Jesus gave Peter some time to center himself, to just be in the presence of the Risen Lord. And then Jesus gave Peter the grace to declare his love for Jesus three times: the same number of times that Peter had denied knowing Jesus. Peter experienced grace upon grace upon grace. “Peter, do you love Me?” Three times Peter was given the opportunity to declare his love for Jesus. Three times Peter had the opportunity to claim the courage that had abandoned him on that terrible night when Jesus was arrested, by expressing louder, and more vehemently each time, that he loved, loved, loved Jesus! Three times Peter got to understand that courage is accepting that God forgives us, and God redeems our mistakes, to teach us, to heal us, and to use us to build God’s kingdom.

On Pentecost Sunday we celebrated the appearance of the Holy Spirit, the birth of the church, and the powerful witness people heard - 3,000 people came to know Jesus that day! Do you remember who gave that powerful Pentecost witness? It was Peter. Peter was courageous enough to accept forgiveness; he allowed Jesus to redeem his mistakes; and God used him to build God’s kingdom.

Last spring I preached a sermon about forgiveness using Dr. Fred Luskin’s book, *Forgive For Good*. Dr. Luskin is the director of the Stanford Forgiveness Project, and I heard him the first time at Palo Alto First UMC. Dr. Luskin is an amazing person, and gracious, and he gently pointed out that the church is (supposed to be) in the business of forgiveness. If you haven’t read *Forgive For Good* I highly recommend it, and I’m happy to loan it to you. I also recommend to you John’s gospel - the 21st chapter - in which we learn with Peter a key to forgiveness. The key is believing that God forgives our mistakes, even grievous mistakes like Peter’s, and that God redeems them in order to love and to heal and to use us. It takes so much courage to believe that! How many of us can lie in bed at night and revisit our sins, and errors in judgment, and our stupidity, and unkindness, until the bed is crowded with guilt and shame, like we are sharing the space with too many stuffed animals?

We need to remember, and to claim as our own, Peter’s story... God’s story... of forgiveness and redemption and kingdom-building. In welcoming Peter onto the beach for breakfast Jesus held out a lifeline to Peter of love and forgiveness. And Peter found within himself courage to accept it. Perhaps we are often not good at forgiving because we haven’t accepted God’s forgiveness. If you’ve done something that you (or someone else) consider “unforgivable”, or something stupid, or shameful, then you’re in good company. So did Peter. And what he teaches us is that we need courage to accept the forgiveness and redemption that Jesus offers us.

What gives us that courage? It’s our knowledge of Jesus, and our faith in Him. It’s our experience with Jesus. When we know Jesus and have experienced His love and mercy, we find courage, we take a risk, to be loved and healed and used for God’s

purposes. And when we know ourselves to be forgiven and redeemed... sometimes we can find the courage to forgive someone else who has grievously hurt us. We can let it go, give it God, and ask God to heal and redeem the person, or the situation. We can ask God to fill us with love, to fill us with the courage to love.

For three weeks in July I'm preaching about courage, and I've chosen a verse from the Psalms for us to memorize. Please find our memory verse on page 2 and let's say it together: "Wait for the Lord; be strong and let your heart take courage." Psalm 27:14. And now, as we enter into a time of prayer, let's sing "Something Beautiful." Please notice the line (this is different than in the hymnal) "...All my confusion Jesus understood." Jesus understood Peter better than Peter knew himself, and Jesus knows and understands us. He invites us to offer Him the brokenness and strife of our lives, and to courageously accept the forgiveness and redemption He offers.

"Something beautiful, something good; all my confusion Jesus understood; all I had to offer Him was brokenness and strife, but He made something beautiful of my life."
Amen!