

## Easter 3

May I speak with the love and grace of the living God. Amen.

There are a lot of echoes in our gospel reading today. Echoes back to when the disciples were called to follow Jesus and become fisher of people, at the very beginning of his public ministry. Echoes to that dark night, when everything fell apart. That night was likely traumatic for all the disciples.

A traumatic event changes us. There is a before and after. After, things and we ourselves are never again quite the same. Life goes on, we adjust and eventually we might also find joy and beauty again in life, but we are forever changed by what has happened and it has us see ourselves, the world and God differently.

As time goes on, as wounds slowly heal, whatever traumatic things happened might no longer always be at the forefront of our minds. But little things can drag us right back there. A song, a certain sound, a phrase or word, a taste or a smell.

Jesus is cooking breakfast on a charcoal fire, when the disciples come ashore. There was a charcoal fire as well that night, when Peter's world was turned upside down, when he was scared out of his mind, when he was cold and tried to warm himself by the charcoal fire. When people three times asked if he also was one of those with Jesus and when he three times denied knowing Jesus, only hours after he

had said he would follow Jesus to the death. And then the cock crowed, Jesus looked at Peter and Peter ran away and cried bitterly.

That night was likely traumatic for Peter. That night changed him and broke parts of him. Destroyed his confidence, his self-understanding, his view of the world and of God. Peter likely wished he could simply forget the pain and despair of that night. But I wonder if the smell of the charcoal fire brought back the painful memories for Peter.

**'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?' 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' 'Feed my lambs.'**

Peter is changed, he no longer has the confidence to claim that he loves Jesus more than others, that he will do better than the others. He has tasted failure and humiliation, he has been confronted with the reality of being human, vulnerable, scared and far less heroic than he hoped to be.

**'Simon son of John, do you love me?' 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' 'Tend my sheep.'**

Peter is faced with the pain of being disappointed with himself. And surely so is Jesus. This must be why he asks again the same question. Because Jesus saw Peter that night, Jesus knows that he is just and absolute failure, a fraud, never to be trusted again. Why does Jesus even still bother? He must know, because he knows Peter like no one else knows Peter. He must know he loves him, even though he is an absolute fraud and failure.

**‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ ‘Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.’ ‘Feed my sheep.’**

Again. A third time? Why? Feed my sheep. Three times. Three times Peter has betrayed Jesus. Three Times Jesus asks Peter, if he loves him. Is this **not** Jesus doubting him? Maybe this is **not** Jesus condemning him. Feed my sheep. Is this Jesus speaking forgiveness and redemption into Peter’s life? Feed my sheep. Jesus has not given up on Peter. Jesus affirms Peter’s humbled but nonetheless real love. And three times he affirms Peter’s calling, yes, three times Peter has failed to live up to the heroic image he had of himself. Three times he denied Jesus. Exactly as Jesus already knew he would.

Yes, Peter is less than perfect, he is human and that means every so often he makes a right mess of things. Like we all do. And Jesus knows that full well. Always knew it. And yet, Jesus calls Peter to feed the lambs, tend the sheep and feed the sheep. Jesus always knew that Peter was only human, imperfect, prone to overestimate himself and to sometimes speak and act before he thought things through. But Peter does not need to be perfect or superhuman in order for Jesus to entrust him with the ongoing ministry of feeding his lambs, tending his sheep and feeding his sheep.

By asking Peter three times if he loves him and affirming three times Peter’s calling, Jesus lets Peter know that he is forgiven, that he is redeemed and that he continues to have a place within God’s Kingdom and ministry.

Have you ever tasted failure, humiliation and despair like Peter did? I think sooner or later in our lives we are all faced with our limitations, our imperfections and failures. In ways that can shake us to the core, as Peter was shaken to his core.

Do you love Jesus? Are you drawn to the person of Jesus Christ? The person we encounter in the gospels, who loved without conditions, reached out to any and all on the margins, healed the sick, fed the hungry, ate and drank with all sorts of questionable people, spoke truth to power, was killed on a cross, lay in the grave and rose again on the third day? Are you drawn to this Jesus? Do you love Jesus, maybe a little maybe a lot?

If your answer is yes, no matter how wobbly of a yes it might be, Jesus invites you too to be part of the ministry of God's Kingdom, of feeding the hungry, reaching out to the lonely, speaking truth to power, eating and drinking with all sorts of questionable people, simply to let them know, that they can belong, that they are wanted and precious in the eyes of God. If your answer is yes, then you too are welcome to participate in peace making and in establishing of true justice for all. And it doesn't matter if our lives are littered with moments of failure, of weakness, humiliation and despair. The God who raised Jesus from the dead is also able to redeem the broken pieces of our lives, our weaknesses and failures and that same God invites us to participate in the building up of the Kingdom of God, just like Jesus called Peter.

Do you love Jesus?  
Amen.