

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: John 21:1-14

Sermon Title: "Swim, Run, Whatever... Just Get to Jesus" (Need for Repentance Lenten Series)

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA

April 2, 2017

{SLIDE 1} During this season of Lent, we have looked at stories about repentance. "Repentance is the activity of reviewing one's actions and feeling contrition or regret for past wrongs. It generally involves a commitment to personal change and resolving to live a more responsible and humane life."¹ We have read some stories about people who realized that they sinned against God. They desired to take steps to show their regret and seek out God's forgiveness.

The last character we will read about is Peter. He is one of Jesus' twelve disciples. We might remember him as the disciple who was the leader at times. He would speak first or do things when everybody else stood back. Sometimes he "leapt before he looked," meaning he really didn't think out what he was doing. He did it and discovered the consequences later.

Peter is also the disciples who royally messed up. His sin is deep. It is the sin of betrayal. It is the sin of giving up your friend in order to save your own skin, giving up your Savior in order to keep from dying the

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Repentance>.

same way he did.

{SLIDE 2} It all starts back in John 13. Jesus and the disciples are eating the Passover meal, which will become their last supper together. We remember this meal and our Savior's sacrifice by celebrating the Lord's Supper on occasion. Anyhow, Jesus is telling his disciples how he must be handed over to the authorities. He had been saying all along that he must be arrested, beaten, and then crucified for the sake of all.² These have been hard words for the disciples to grasp. Why would anyone want to kill Jesus? Doesn't he heal people from their diseases? Doesn't he cast demons out of sick people? Doesn't he teach about God's love and God's grace? What has he done wrong to deserve death?

And then death on the cross of all places! This is the Roman form of capital punishment. We have electric chairs and lethal injections. The Romans had the cross. Those who died on the cross were criminals sentenced to death for any number of crimes, but the cross was especially reserved for rebels, people who spoke out against the government and incited violence among the crowds. Those who wanted to overthrow the Roman state were sentenced to die on a cross. But

² Cf. John 13:21-35.

Jesus cannot be associated with those kinds of people, can he? How has he spoken out against Rome to the point of making people want to take up arms and fight? Jesus has been concerned with the kingdom of God, not the kingdoms of earth. He came so that people may repent, turn away from, their sin and believe the good news of salvation.³

{SLIDE 3} So, Jesus points out that Judas is going to betray him to the authorities, and Judas takes off. Jesus then says that he will not be with the disciples for very long, but now is the time for the Son of Man to be glorified. God will glorify him through his death and his resurrection. This is where Peter comes in. This is where Peter begins to royally mess up.

He who always speak before he thinks, he who does before he see what he is doing, says, “Lord, where are you going?”⁴ Jesus replies, “Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterward.” And now here come the words from Peter, leaping before he looks: “Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.”⁵ Is it a lie when a person says something and then doesn’t do it? What if the person doesn’t realize she isn’t going to do what

³ Cf. Mark 1:14-15.

⁴ John 13:36.

⁵ John 13:37.

she says she will, is that still a lie? We may look backward and say that the person lied, if a promise was not kept. Either way, what we can say is that this is the beginning of Peter's betrayal, his deep, dark sin. Jesus questions Peter's bold statement and says, "Will you lay down your life for me? Very truly, I tell you, before the rooster crows you will have denied me three times." Jesus knows what will happen. Jesus knows the truth. Peter has already begun to betray him.

{SLIDE 4} The sin is solidified when Peter does what Jesus says he will do. Peter could have done better. He could have taken the chances given to him to unite himself with his leader, with his Savior, with his God, as Jesus is being questioned by the high Jewish council. First chance: woman at a gate. "You are one of his disciples, aren't you?" Peter flatly denies it. Second chance: a group of people near a fire. "You are also a disciple." Peter flatly denies it. Third chance: a slave of the high priest. "Did I not see you in the garden with Jesus?" Peter flatly denies it. The rooster crows. End of story.⁶

He said he would lay down his life for Jesus. He must have said it with all the force he could muster. He seemed to believe the words, and he could actually have done it. Instead, Peter saves his own skin. He

⁶ Cf. John 18:15-18, 25-27.

throws Jesus under the bus, just as Jesus said he would. His deep, dark sin, his great betray, is now complete.

{SLIDE 5} Both Gospels of Matthew and Luke tells us that Peter left the area and wept bitterly. Mark 14 says he broke down and wept.⁷ He could not contain himself and just let his body fall apart in an ocean of tears. He must have felt deep, deep pain for what he did. He betrayed a friend. He betrayed his Savior.

We may have felt the same kind of pain, when we have let somebody down. When we talked against them or talked behind their back, and realized the damage we did to their reputation. When we couldn't help them in one way or another, and we know we could have but we just chose not to. I felt like a betrayed a couple of our clients at our Food Pantry one Thursday. They asked for gasoline, because the gauge was reading nearly empty in their car. They asked me for help and I refused. Here are the lame excuses: we were quite busy that day and it didn't feel right to leave the others with the work; my immediate reaction (in my head) was that they already got food and they want more; the question caught me off guard and I took the easy road by saying no. Lame excuses. I

⁷ Cf. Matthew 26:75, Luke 22:62, and Mark 14:72

didn't think much of what I said to them, until they left the parking lot. Then the Holy Spirit did some work on me. I felt terrible for a long time. I felt like a selfish jerk. I felt that I betrayed them. The word betray has many meaning including this one: "to fail or desert especially in time of need."⁸ I betrayed those two people with not driving to the gas station with them and using my credit card to give them \$10 worth of gas.

I felt awful. I can only imagine how Peter felt after the rooster crowed. I cannot even compare my pain to his. It must have been gut wrenching. It must have been like he couldn't breathe, couldn't walk, couldn't face life anymore. Who knows what went through his head? Who knows how the Holy Spirit did some work on him? But it must have been awful, unbearable.

{SLIDE 6} We come to John 21, on the third day after Jesus' crucifixion. The disciples have no leader and it seems they have no more ministry to carry out. So they decide to go fishing.

Some preachers like to criticize the disciples for doing what they do in John 21. Their leader and Savior is gone, and all they can think about is going fishing?⁹ Is that any way to mourn the death of a

⁸ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/betray>.

⁹ Cf. John 21:1-3.

friend, of a great leader, of the One you hoped would change peoples' lives forever? From one angle it seems like the disciples are being somewhat calloused, somewhat thick-skinned. They seem to be ignoring the fact that Jesus has died, and died brutally on the cross.

However, another angle shows us another side of the situation. This is what the men were used to: fishing. Before they became disciples, they were fishermen. It was their sole occupation. They now have the time to do what they grew up to do, but they may also go fishing to get their minds off of what happened. Sometimes we occupy ourselves with something, so that we don't have to think too much about the bad thing that happened to us. In Peter's case, he may be fishing because he really needs to get his mind off things. He has to try to push away the image of Jesus telling him that he will betray Jesus, and the image of all those people asking Peter if he was a disciple and him saying absolutely not (even swearing at them¹⁰), and the image of the rooster crowing and completing his betrayal. Peter would like to forget it all. If he can go fishing, maybe he can get his mind off the images and feel less rotten.

¹⁰ Cf. Matthew 26:74.

{SLIDE 7} However, unbeknownst to the disciples, Jesus is on the move. He has risen from the grave as he said he would. He is roaming the area and finding himself at daybreak on the shore of a lake. This is the same lake that Peter and Company are fishing. Jesus is about to cook breakfast, and so he calls out to the men in their boat to see what they are doing. Maybe they could join him.

“Children, how’s the fishing?” Jesus cries out. “Not so good,” they call back. “Really, that is bad. Hey, why don’t you cast your net over that direction?” “Which direction?” “That side, the right side of the boat. I think there could be some fish over there.” “Okay.”¹¹

Peter and Company cast the nets and almost immediately it is full of fish. They have so many fish that they cannot haul the nets back into their boat. They fight and struggle together. They don’t want the boat to capsize and they don’t want to lose their bounty.

{SLIDE 8} Somehow, during all of this, the disciple John has the wherewithal to exclaim, “Hey, I think that is the Lord on the shore.”¹² He is able to take his attention from the nets and fish and discover who was calling out to them from the shore. It must be Jesus,

¹¹ Cf. John 21:4-6.

¹² John 21:7.

because Jesus did the same thing to them three years ago. Three years ago, they were fishing. They had caught nothing. Jesus told them to cast their nets in a different direction, and all of a sudden they caught a ton load of fish.¹³

A lightbulb in Peter's head turns on instantly. He completely forgets what he was doing with the nets and fish. Jesus is on the shore, his brain tells him! Jesus is alive! The brain compels Peter's body to move. He must get to Jesus now. Peter is the one who leaps before he looks, and sometimes he ends up making a bad decision. He sometimes finds himself in a bad place. This time, Peter see the Lord and makes the correct leap into the water. He must jump in and swim to Jesus right now.

Notice though that he puts on clothes before jumping into the water.¹⁴ He is already naked, as John tells us. The survivalist books tell us that if you have to jump into deep water, wear the least amount of clothes you can. Wet clothes weigh people down and may drown them. Peter is already "naked," or actually he is not wearing his outer garment (his long robe) like any respectable Jews would. Fishermen always fished without wearing long robes. He is probably fishing in his loincloth, which could still get

¹³ Cf. Luke 5:1-11.

¹⁴ Cf. John 21:7.

wet and not drag him down as he swims. But Peter thinks clearly enough to put on his robe, which would be the respectable thing to do. He cannot approach his Savior disrespectfully naked, the Man he betrayed so severely. He cannot come to him as a person who doesn't understand his sin – he approaches with honor and respect due to Jesus, because Peter is truly sorry for what he did.

Notice also that the rest of the disciples have to lug in their heavy nets and weighed-down boats.¹⁵ They really could have used Peter's help at this time, and yet he leaves them hanging. He jumps into the water and leaves them to do the heavy work. But Peter is the one who sinned greatly against Jesus. He is totally focused on Jesus, and saying he is sorry, and receive some forgiveness hopefully for his betrayal. The rest of the disciples can manage. They should allow Peter to do what is right: repent, make amends, be united once more to Christ.

{SLIDE 9} And that is what happens.¹⁶ Peter has breakfast with Jesus – Jesus cooked the meal to show Peter and the rest that all is forgiven. Jesus will not hold Peter's betrayal against him. Peter receives ministry from Jesus: "Feed my lambs, tend my sheep."

¹⁵ Cf. John 21:8.

¹⁶ Cf. John 21:9-19.

Since the betrayal is forgiven, Jesus has work for Peter to do, because he trust Peter can do it. They are united together. Peter understands what Jesus had to do, and now he will live for Christ, being his bold spokesmen, serving as his intrepid servant, all the way to his own death on a cross.

What we learn from, Peter is this: Do not delay in finding Christ and asking for forgiveness. No matter how large or small we think our sin is, no matter if it involves betrayal or anger or jealousy or any other sin, move quickly to Jesus Christ to be cleared of it. When the Holy Spirit is working on you, make the effort right away to do what needs to be done to make things right. During this season of Lent, we heard stories of many opportunities to repent of sin. Kings and chief tax collectors and homeowners and disciples all had the chance to admit their guilt and turn to Christ for pardon. Even though this series is complete and Lent nearly finished, we still must seek the Lord for healing. We still must run to him each day for restoration. Only Christ can make us whole. Only Christ will cook us food to eat, give us ministry to carry out, and walk with us for the rest of eternity.

The Assurance of Pardon:

Hear the good news! Who is in the position to condemn us? Only Jesus Christ is, and he died for us. Christ rose for us. Christ reigns in power for us. Christ intercedes for us. Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old life has gone; a new life has begun. Friends, believe the gospel: in Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. Amen.