

Really Good News

God of the Second Chance

Luke 22:54–62 (NIV)

Seizing *Jesus*, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. 55 And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. 56 A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, “This man was with him.” 57 But he denied it. “Woman, I don’t know him,” he said. 58 A little later someone else saw him and said, “You also are one of them.” “Man, I am not!” Peter replied. 59 About an hour later another asserted, “Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean.” 60 Peter replied, “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!” Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. 61 The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.” 62 And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Introduction. When my three sons were in elementary school, they were quite competitive with each other and me. (Of course, I was rather competitive myself as well.) For example, if while playing Putt Putt one of the boys hit a terrible shot, he would demand a “do-over.” I must say that we had lots of “do overs.”

SLIDE 1

Have you ever found yourself in a place where you wanted a “do over.” You just want to pick up the ball, place it back in the tee box, erase the score for the bad shot and hit it again. Unfortunately, we learn in life that do overs are not freely offered in many, if not most situations - a spouse is unfaithful and the offended spouse struggles to forgive and can't reconcile; the teacher sexually abuses a student is fired and never able to teach youth again, a pharmacist becomes addicted to opioids and loses her license and never works in that vocation again, a high school student posts a foolish racially charged message online and years later it becomes known and cancel culture attacks, an attorney is disbarred for corruption . . . What goes on the record stays on the record.

So when it comes to our relationship with God, we sometimes imagine after we have messed up that God will not or cannot forgive us and take us back. We wonder if God can really give us a second chance.

The Failure.

One of the most interesting characters in the Bible is Peter. He could in a matter of moments go from being an admired hero to a rascal. At times he was a pillar of strength and courage and at another his blunders were very pronounced. Because he was not the kind of guy who was in the background and go unnoticed what he did and said was noticed by others.

On one occasion, Peter was commended by Jesus because he recognized and affirmed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. But in a few moments as Jesus was describing that he must suffer and be put to death, Peter said that could not happen. In response to him, Jesus said, “*Get behind me Satan.*” From a great man of faith who had insight about the true nature of Jesus to being called “Satan” was Peter's pattern.

Peter's greatest blunder and failure came at one of his most challenging moments in the course of him following Jesus. He had been warned by the Lord that it would happen but he was confident he could prove Jesus wrong on this matter. Jesus had told Peter he would deny him three times before the night was over. Peter was confident he thought he was ready to lay his own life on the line for Jesus.

Then it happened. Jesus was arrested by members of the Jewish police and carried away to be tried before the Jewish impromptu court. Peter, keeping his distance, followed the men as they led Jesus to the outdoor courtyard where some of the proceedings would take place. In an open area in line of sight of Jesus, Peter joined a few people around a charcoal fire in order to warm himself on that cool evening and not to look too conspicuous. It was there he fielded questions and accusations that he was a follower of Jesus, the man on trial. Three times he was pointed out as being one of Jesus' men.

This was really an opportunity for Peter's extraordinary courage to shine through, right? He could make a bold statement and stand with Jesus. But that is not what happened. He choked. To each of the accusations, he replied that he had no connection to Jesus. He denied his teacher and friend. He denied the Lord and Messiah.

After the third denial, the rooster crowed and Jesus looked at him. Peter remembered Jesus' words earlier that he would fail and he now was confronted with his failure. He went away and wept bitterly. He had really messed up. At that moment he probably felt forever lost and was in despair. Oh, how he would like to have a “do over!”

Peter is not the only person who has let Jesus down.

In the past few years, a couple of high profile pastors encountered major difficulties when they were found out for improper behaviors - one for financial mismanagement and the other for inappropriate sexual behavior. Both were removed from the churches they served. These events led a favorite theologian of mine, Scot McKnight, to write an excellent book, *“A Church Called Tov,”* (Hebrew word for “good”).

SLIDE 2

In the book, Scot attempts to help churches and leaders from ending up where these two pastors and their churches ended up.

Not long ago a colleague and friend of mine since the early days of my ministry was defrocked, (orders removed) because of inappropriate behavior which probably stem from an addiction. While he probably will never return to pastoring, he too finds himself in that awkward position with God. “Can I be forgiven,” he wonders?

It is highly unlikely if either of these men will rise to position of leadership in the Christian community again which is probably appropriate. *But as men who were followers of Jesus Christ who went astray, they undoubtedly have wondered if God can forgive them and restore them. Can God give them a second chance?*

While only a few have “Reverend” in front of their name, many, if not most of us can relate to experiences where we feel we have let God down, messed up and failed to the degree that we wonder if God can forgive us and restore us. It may be because we have committed some “major” sin, done something again that we promised we would never do again, doubted God or gotten angry with God, gave up on ministry we were called to do, find ourselves trapped in a destructive addiction, dropped out of church, etc.

SLIDE 3

Is it possible for God to give us a second chance?

James Bryan Smith, author of the Good and Beautiful series, came to follow Jesus as a late teen. Upon graduation from high school, he attended a Christian college where his peers gave him a false narrative of God as a wrathful being. *If one sinned after they were converted and did not confess all those sins, it would be bore on their souls. At that point in his life, he did not understand God as being very forgiving.*

I imagine that many have seen God in this way. God expects us to toe the line and if we err, woe to the errant one! *Could it be possible this is not the right picture of God? Is God, One who gives us a second chance?*

The Second Chance.

Fortunately in the Peter story, there is a second chapter which is found in John 21. (I encourage you to read that chapter this week.) For now, please listen to the story.

As you probably know, Jesus’ arrest and trial led to a conviction with him being executed on a cross. On the third day following his death, Jesus was raised from the dead and appeared to many of the disciples, including Peter.

It was during this period of time that Peter got a hankering to go fishing. Along with a few of the other disciples, he went back to some of his favorite fishing holes along the Galilee Lake. Unfortunately, the fisherman had a futile night and had caught nothing.

Well, Jesus showed up on shore and told them where to cast their net. When they did, they brought in a huge haul of fish. Peter realized it was Jesus on the shore and dove into the water to swim to him. *When he got to the shore, Jesus had kindled a charcoal fire and was cooking a few fish.*

No doubt, Peter moved close to the glowing coals to warm and dry himself. It is intriguing that in John’s telling of the story of Peter’s denial and Jesus meeting Peter on the seashore, that he specifies what kind of fire was burning - a charcoal fire. A charcoal fire has a particular smell, appearance and radiates heat in a particular way. To warm from a charcoal fire requires moving close to the glowing embers.

I imagine that as Peter drew near the charcoal fire along the seashore, its smell,

appearance and warmth reminded him of the other charcoal fire. As his senses took in the fire, his mind and soul were transported back to a dark moment in his life. The pain and the guilt he had felt were re-ignited by the glow of the seashore fire. He was again confronted with his blunder and the denial. He was reminded of his greatest failure. He probably wondered, “Does Jesus still love me?” “Can he forgive and restore me?”

Life has its way of reminding us of our blunders and failures. Sometimes they too are ignited by a smell, a sight and a memory. In a moment, we can be plunged into the depth of guilt and shame. The question arises within if Jesus still loves us and can forgive and restore.

The story of Jesus’ encounter with Peter begins to reveal the true nature of God. The story is clear that Jesus intentionally came to the place where Peter was. It may have been that “going fishing” was for Peter an attempt to escape his guilt and pain. It is apparent that at that particular moment, Peter was not actively seeking forgiveness and restoration.

God’s amazing love is seen in the fact that Jesus came to Peter. Here is the amazing reality revealed that not only is God willing to forgive us for our blunders and failures, God moves toward us.

Jesus told an amazing parable about a son who demanded his father give him his inheritance. The father did so. The son left home and squandered everything and found himself in deep poverty. Eventually the son realized the huge mistake he had made and that even his father’s servants were better than he. So he decided to go home, confess he had done wrong and ask his father to just give him a job as a servant. Jesus said that while the son was still a distance from home, the father saw him and ran to greet him. The father was waiting and hoping for his errant son to return.

The story of Peter reveals that God not only is waiting for those who fail to return but also is moving toward them. This is really good news.

The Encounter.

Jesus not only was waiting for Peter on the seashore but he also initiated a conversation with Peter. It was in the midst of that conversation where the restoration happened. It is interesting that in the story of the Prodigal son, after the father embraced his son, the son confessed and asked for restoration as a servant. In the two stories we see that it does always look the same. What is true in both stories is God engaging with each of us and us with God.

For Peter, Jesus asked an all important question: “*Peter, do you love me?*” Peter may have wondered if Jesus loved him after he had failed. The very question seems to reveal that Jesus’ love is intact. What Peter needed was a reaffirmation of that love. Jesus asked him the same question three times, the number of denials. Jesus was doing some high level therapy with Peter.

Then at the end of the conversation, Jesus said to him - “*Follow me.*” Jesus was giving Peter another chance and restored him in the relationship.

This morning if you feel estranged from God because of something you have done or have failed to do, know that God wants to give you another chance. God wants to restore the relationship to a healthy place. God wants to forgive you and give you renewed purpose in your life. As a matter of fact, God is already reaching out to you. Open your heart to the Lord. Engage in conversation. Admit your failure. Commit yourself to Him anew.