

Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, April 7, 2024
"Wandering Heart: Here's My Heart"

Young at Heart Message

Today is our final Sunday using the Wandering Heart sermon series.

I debated whether or not I wanted to finish this series today, or last Sunday on Easter.

But, I think today's scripture gives us an opportunity to close out the series by bookending it and bringing it full circle.

So, I'd like to begin with a retelling of today's scripture.

As I retell today's scripture, I want you to think about how this passage relates to the story of Peter that we've heard so far.

What about this story seems similar to the other stories we've heard about Peter?

What is different?

Where are the parallels?

As I retell the story, think about these questions.

After the retelling, I'd like a few volunteers to try to share what patterns we see in this story and how it's similar to the other stories we've heard.

Let's begin:

After Jesus had died and been raised from the dead, the disciples went back to their boats on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, where they had been fishermen before they met Jesus. They fished all night and caught nothing.

Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore. He was far away and it wasn't light yet so the disciples didn't know it was him. Jesus shouted to the disciples on the boat, "Have you caught anything?" They told him, "No."

Jesus told the disciples, "Throw your nets on the other side of the boat." They did, and the net was so full they couldn't pull them all into the boat!

It was then that the disciples realized the man on the shore was Jesus. Peter couldn't wait for the boat to take him to shore—he jumped into the water with his clothes on, leaving the other disciples to bring in the boat and all the fish.

When they reached the shore, Jesus had already started cooking breakfast over the fire. He gave the disciples bread to eat and cooked some of the fish they had caught.

After breakfast, Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love me?” Peter replied, “Yes, you know I love you.”

So Jesus told him, “Feed my lambs.” Again Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love me?” He replied, “Yes, you know I love you.”

So Jesus told him, “Take care of my sheep.” And a third time, Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love me?” Peter was sad that Jesus had asked him again. Didn't Jesus believe him? Peter told Jesus, “Lord, you know everything. You know I love you.” So Jesus told him, “Feed my sheep and follow me.”

So, what do you think? What sounds familiar in this story to the other passages about Peter that we've heard during the Lenten season?

...

...

The Message

Today's scripture is indeed reminiscent of the story we heard the very first week of Lent, when Simon Peter becomes a disciple of Christ.

In that story, if you recall, Peter and his crew were out fishing all night and hadn't caught any fish.

When they return to shore, Jesus tells them to go back out, and reluctantly they do.

And then, they catch so many fish that they almost tip their boat over.

In today's passage, we also see the disciples not recognize Christ initially, which is reminiscent of the story in which Christ asks his disciples who they say that he is, and they relay that Jesus has been mistaken for Elijah or John the Baptist.

It takes them a minute to realize the man on shore is Jesus, but when they do finally realize it, Peter jumps into the water to start swimming to shore to reach him.

This of course reminds us of the passage in which Peter steps out of the boat to try to walk on water toward Jesus, but ultimately begins to sink.

Jesus cooks bread and fish for the disciples for breakfast, which is reminiscent of several different stories in which Jesus breaks bread and feeds his disciples.

Finally, Jesus asks Peter if he loves him.

And this is where the story seems to deviate from other stories of the disciples and of Peter thus far.

But, upon closer inspection of this passage, I actually think this story is reminiscent of Peter's denial of Christ.

This isn't Jesus' way of reprimanding Peter or making him feel guilt or shame for denying him.

I think this is Jesus' way of offering Peter grace for his denial.

It's as if Jesus says, "Here's my heart," which washes over Peter's three denials like a healing balm.

This grace that's offered to Peter is a reminder that no matter how far we wander, we can entrust our hearts to God, like Peter did.

Once again, we see Jesus offer Peter abundance.

Peter's journey – like ours – is not linear. We see his story come full circle in today's passage.

We watch as God's grace continues to circle back to Peter again and again, like a familiar chorus being played on repeat.

It is almost as if Jesus is asking us the same question over and over again – Do you love me?

Do we love him?

Even though we might stray from time to time – even though our journey does not always follow a straight path – do we love Jesus and follow him?

Jesus is offering Peter, and us, his grace in this passage.

He is also offering a new command – to feed his sheep and to follow him.

What might Jesus mean when he tells Peter to feed his sheep?

I don't think Jesus is referring to literal sheep that he's asking Peter to feed.

I think this is a much deeper and more profound call that Jesus is asking Peter to accept.

So far, after Jesus' death, the disciples have not been sure what to do now that he's gone.

So they do what they know – they return to the work that they were doing when they first met Jesus.

This is natural for people who aren't sure what to do next – we tend to return to what we know.

But Jesus is asking Peter for more.

Jesus is asking Peter to continue his work with the people.

Jesus is telling Peter that if he does truly love him, then he will step outside of his comfort zone and become the new shepherd of Jesus' flock.

Peter's call is not one that will be easy for Peter, and Jesus knows this.

Jesus knows that Peter has not always been consistent in his faith or his trust.

But I think Jesus also knows that Peter is ready now – ready to transition to becoming a leader and a guide who will continue to live out Jesus' message of hope and of grace.

The beauty and hope in this command is that whether our faith feels weak or strong, whether we are wandering on our path or steadfast and certain, we can always offer our love to Jesus, and we will always receive his love and grace in return.

And even if we are unsure of the path before us, or we feel paralyzed from fear or uncertainty, Jesus is patient and understanding.

Jesus waits on the shore and makes us a metaphorical breakfast, reassuring us that even if we deny him, or lose our way, his love for us is never-ending.

He proved that to us last week by suffering and dying for us.

We can rest assured, on this post-resurrection Sunday and every other day of our life, that Jesus loves us, cares about us, serves us, and forgives us.

And this is the Good News that comes to us, knowing that Christ is alive and walks with us as we journey through this life.

Amen.

Let us pray:

God of second chances and God of new life, we have spent our days wandering. Like Peter, we have milled about through nearly every state of faith. We have had courageous days and convicted days, learning days and questioning days. We have had days where we run to you, days for diving out of the boat, days for deep joy, and days where the pain of the world feels too close to bear.

So as we bring our wandering hearts to you, we ask that you draw us in. Allow this story to spark something new in us. Allow this story of grace to give us pause and pull us in. Prepare us, O God, to follow you. Amen.

Portions of this sermon reference materials from *A Sanctified Art LLC* | sanctifiedart.org. Used with permission.