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The Resurrected Jesus and Our Failures

Here & Now Series

John 21:1-25

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Well, as we just saw, the title of this series that we've been walking through after Easter is how the resurrected Jesus meets us right where we are—right where we are; right Here, right now—whatever we're walking through, right where we are. But here's a question for you this morning. What if that is exactly what you're concerned about? What if the idea of Jesus meeting you right where you are is something that causes some anxiety, some concern for you? Maybe you think, “I don't know that I'm quite ready for that.”

Over these past three weeks, we've been walking through the different encounters that the resurrected Jesus has had with different numbers or different people among His disciples. The first week, we studied His encounter with Mary and kind of meeting her in the midst of her sadness. And then we looked at the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and they were caught up in confusion, and Jesus came and ministered to them right there, right in the midst of their confusion. Then, last week, we talked about Thomas. Thomas hadn't really seen all the evidence for the resurrection, and so, in his doubt, Jesus came and ministered to him and revealed the evidence for the resurrection, meeting him right where he was.

I think, when it comes to those three kinds of circumstances, those three states of mind—sadness and confusion and doubt—I think that we're inclined to say, “Oh, I can't wait for Jesus to show up and meet me here, resolve that tension, resolve that sadness, resolve that doubt.” But, when it comes to our failures, oh, I think we're a little more inclined to say, “Ah, I'm not so sure about that.” There are failures, and then there are moral failures, and I think, particularly when we're talking about moral failures, I think we start to think, “I don't know how He'll respond. I don't know that I want to be in front of Him. I'm not ready for Him to come directly to me when I'm walking through what I'm walking through right now.” Despite the fact that for 2,000 years, the gospel of grace, the gospel of Jesus Christ, has been proclaimed, despite the fact that, in this church for 60 years, it has faithfully been proclaimed that there is nothing that we can do to earn God's favor, we still struggle. We still struggle as people when we fall short. When we fail, we start to live in this cloud of guilt and shame. It starts to be what defines the way we walk around, and sometimes it even starts to paralyze us from participating in the fullness of life with Christ. So, the question for us this morning is: How does Jesus meet us right in the midst of our failures?

In order to explore that, we're going to pick up where Bryan left off last week in the Book of John. So, turn with me to John, Chapter 21. You'll remember, last week it was the encounter with Thomas—the disciples and Thomas—and Jesus came and ministered to Thomas. All of that took place about eight days after the resurrection in the city of Jerusalem. So now, as we turn the page, essentially turning to chapter 21, John is going to set a new scene for us. So, in John, chapter 21, verse 1, he says:

After these things... (So that's just after the events that we just read about last week, after the events of that Upper Room and that encounter with Thomas in Jerusalem.) **...Jesus manifested Himself...** (Literally, He showed Himself; He made Himself visible.) **...again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested *Himself* in this way.**

(*NASB, John 21:1)

So here at the beginning of Chapter 21, John is just setting the scene for us. The situation, the location has changed. Everything up to this point last week took place in Jerusalem. Now, we don't know exactly how many days after that moment it is, but the scene has moved north. They are back in the region of Galilee. And, of course, we're very familiar with Galilee. So much of Jesus' ministry took place right in the towns and the surrounding area of Galilee. About eighty percent of His ministry took place right there. And, for these disciples, this would have been a coming home, essentially. So many of them were from Galilee, and Jesus' call to them came in Galilee. In fact, for some of them, it came from this very sea that was just mentioned, **at the Sea of Tiberias**, which is just the Roman word or the Latin word for the Sea of Galilee. You might remember that, when Jesus met Mary in the garden, He told her to let the disciples know that they should go to Galilee, and He would meet them there. And so that's precisely what's happened. They've made the journey north, and now they are awaiting the resurrected Jesus to come and instruct them further. John says: **He manifested Himself in this way.** In other words, this is how it went down. Verse 2:

Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, (And we know that's James and John) ...and two others of His disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will also come with you." They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing. (Vs. 2-3)

So we know of seven disciples. There are eleven that are remaining, but we know of the seven of them here, five of them are named. We don't know who the other two are. I always wonder, did the other two come to John and say, "Hey, what gives? Like, couldn't you just have named us? Yeah, you named five. Couldn't you have named us?" We don't know exactly why John did that.

But they're waiting for Jesus. They're waiting for what's next. And so, they set out to fish. Now, scholars have debated for a while about what exactly motivated this fishing expedition, and some have suspected that maybe the disciples, at this point, are dejected. And maybe in their dejection, they kind of are falling back to what they knew, and they're almost saying, "Okay, I guess we'll just go back to being fishermen again." And so, they're kind of returning to their old profession, and that certainly could be the case. But I think it's just as likely that they just were going fishing. These are fishermen. They know fishing. And maybe they also were hungry. You know, people need to eat. They might have needed to go catch some fish. It's also possible that they wanted to maybe make some money. They could fish at night, as commercial fishermen in Galilee were likely to do, and then they would go to market that morning and sell what they caught. And, you know, we know that Jesus, in His ministry, was supported by benefactors. But maybe at this moment, they wanted to sell some fish to have some money. We don't know exactly why, but we do know they went fishing.

And then we know that they caught nothing. Nothing! That's a long night. I am no fisherman, but I do know fishermen like to catch fish. All right, that's the point. You go out to catch fish. But they caught nothing. This would have been a long night. It would have been a wearying night. Seven, eight hours fishing; nothing to show for it. And so, we don't know exactly whether dejection drove them out onto the boat in the first place, but I think it's pretty likely that, when they were coming back to shore, they were maybe a little dejected. No one likes to go out and fish all night and come back empty-handed. So, they were weary; they were probably hungry; they were tired. And I suspect, if it were me, at least, I would be a little bit exasperated. You know, you kind of feel like: Man, all these events; we're so confused; we don't know what's next; and now, we just go out to do something we know—we just go out to catch fish—and we can't even catch a fish. Give me a break. I think I'd be

somewhat exasperated. So, they're on this wearying, frustrating trip back to the shore. But things were about to change. Verse 4:

But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. So Jesus said to them, “Children, you do not have any fish, do you?” They answered Him, “No.” And He said to them, “Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch.” So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish. (Vs. 4-6)

So, something has clearly changed with Jesus. We've caught little glimpses of this these past three weeks, that He's the same, but somehow different—such that His disciples have a little bit of trouble recognizing him. He's in this resurrected, glorified state, so something's changed, even though He's the same. But what hasn't changed? What hasn't changed is Jesus' ability to change everything by the working of His miraculous power. The One who performed miracles while He was with them, is still the One who performs miracles.

And, clearly, that's the only explanation for what transpired. You know they didn't really recognize who was calling out to them on the beach. And, really, when you think about it, it's a ridiculous request. “Hey, put the net just on the other side.” As if, for the past seven hours, eight hours, the fish had just been hanging out on the right side and these guys had just been fishing on the left side; and, oh, if we had just gone on the right side, we'd have caught fish. No, it's a ridiculous request. It sounds irrational. At least it sounds irrational to us. But what we might be inclined to miss—but I know that at least three of these disciples didn't miss—is that they had heard Jesus make this request before. So, I'm confident that, for at least Peter and James and John, they remembered when they heard Jesus make this very same request three years ago.

When you have time on your own or in your Life Group, I'd encourage you to read this story in Luke 5. We don't have time to turn there now, but I'm just going to summarize it for you. In Luke 5, Jesus is preaching, and the crowds have gotten so great when they start to gather. And so He moves onto a boat on the Sea of Galilee. They're kind of crowding the shore, and it's a boat that happens to be Peter's boat. And after He's done preaching and teaching, He then turns to Peter and He says, “Put the nets out in the deep water.” And at that point, Peter said to Him, “Lord, we fished all night. We're tired. We caught nothing. But if you say it, we'll do it.” And so, they did. They put their nets out, and we're told that they brought in a haul that was so big that it broke their very nets. And Peter, then recognizing the power, the authority of who was standing in front of him, kind of falls down before Him and says, “I need to be away from You. I'm a sinful man!” And then Jesus makes that incredible statement that echoes in our ears. He said, “Follow me, and I'll make you fishers of people.” And their whole life changed, and they set out on-mission with Him. And so, I have no doubt that James and John and Peter, who were all there together—they were partners in a fishing commercial business—and I have no doubt that, in this moment, when Jesus said this, there was a little bit of wonder that kind of popped up for them. Maybe a little bit of anticipation because they had heard Jesus say this before. And so, surely, they knew they were about to encounter their resurrected Lord. Continuing in verse 7:

Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved... (I always find it interesting that John refers to himself that way. You know, I don't recommend tomorrow at work telling your coworkers. “I'm the employee that the boss really loves, you know.” *(laughter)* But John can get away with it. So, John refers to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved.) ...**said to Peter, “It is the Lord.” So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment**

on (for he was stripped *for work*), and (he) threw himself into the sea. But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish. (Vs. 7-8)

Can you just imagine that scene? Jesus makes the request. They put the net on the right side, and John and Peter and James look at each other. And you can almost just see them look at each other and make eyes and say, "It's the Lord." And John says it. "**It is the Lord.**" And Peter is very Peter in this moment. He dives right in and starts that one-hundred-yard freestyle swim back to shore. He wants to meet Jesus. It's just an incredible scene.

I want to linger on Peter for just a moment. Peter, who just dove in head-first, grabbed his clothes, had to get to shore before the other disciples, because John is going to kind of turn our attention to Peter here in the verses that follow. We love Peter, don't we? Peter is just so amusing in some ways. He's just so inspiring and amusing in the way that he is just so impulsive so often. He's the one that seems to say the thing that we always, maybe, wish we would say or that we wish someone in the story would say. So, he just blurts it out. Often, he does the thing that you think, you know, is anyone going to do this now? And Peter just does it. He kind of just leads out with his impulse. That's part of what we just love about him.

Peter experienced some incredible highs with Jesus in his life with Jesus. One that comes to mind for me is, at a moment where Jesus had given a particularly difficult teaching, you know, and he had this crowd around him. It seemed that there were so many people that followed Jesus. There were those who drew really near to Him and wanted to be His disciples, but there were clearly those who just were kind of curious, and they were staying on the fringes. And after Jesus gave a particularly hard teaching, the crowd left. They abandoned Him. And Jesus turns to His disciples, and He says, "Are you going to leave me, too?" And Peter says, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Where are we going to go? Why would we follow anyone but You? You're it! Others may not see it, but You're it!" I just love that moment with Peter.

There's another time where Jesus is asking the disciples, "Who do the people say that I am?" And they say, "John or Elijah, different people". And He says, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter proclaims in this incredible moment, "You are the Christ! You are the Messiah. You're the anointed One. You are the Son of the living God!" And Jesus affirms him and says, "God gave this to you, Peter. That wasn't from flesh and blood. That was God that inspired you to say that."

Peter got these incredible high moments with Jesus. Of course, the one we all remember is the one where Jesus was walking to them at night, on the water, on the Sea of Galilee. And Peter sees it, and he says, "Lord, tell me to come to You." And so the Lord says, "Come," and so Peter goes, and he walks on the water. And then he sinks. And sometimes it seems like, when we talk about that story, we kind of talk about, "Oh, look at Peter. He sank in the water!" But Peter walked on the water for at least a few steps, and that's an amazing thing, right? Only two people that I know of have done that. If I was writing my résumé, and I had walked on water for at least one step, I'd say, "Hey, I walked on water!" I mean, What a moment...what a moment!

Peter has these incredible experiences with his Lord. And I think it's the incredible heights that he ascended to with Jesus, just these incredible encounters with Jesus, that make his denials on the night of Jesus' arrest just so devastating to me. So devastating...just heartbreaking when you think about that moment. You know Peter, in that Upper Room, is talking to Jesus and proclaiming, "I'm going to be with You anywhere. I'll go with You anywhere!" And Jesus looks at him and He says, "Peter,

before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, you're going to deny me three times.” And Peter is just dumbfounded. “There's no way. It's not possible.” And even as we look at Peter's life, we say, “How is that even possible? How could Peter deny Jesus?”

And then, it happened. As Peter was in the courtyard while Jesus is beginning His trial, kind of beginning this horrific journey He is going on, Peter is in the courtyard warming himself by a charcoal fire. John gives us that detail, and it's an important detail that we're going to come back to in just a moment. But as Peter warms himself by this charcoal fire, it happened. Someone comes up to him and says, “You were with Him,” and Peter says, “No, I'm not with Him. I don't know who that is.” And then someone else says it again, and it's repeated two times. And then, Peter gets so emphatic in his denial of his Lord that he says, “I swear to you, I do not know that man!”

And then Luke gives us this incredible detail. As he tells the story, Jesus, from where He is, looks over and makes eyes with Peter. And I can just imagine that moment. Peter's heart just has to sink. He looks at his Lord, and he denied Him, denied he knew Him, denied relationship with Him. And I have to just think that Peter, in that moment, was so surrounded by a cloud of shame and guilt, it had to be overwhelming! We know that Peter didn't accompany Jesus to the cross. I have to think that, despite all the highs that Peter had gone through, all the incredible experiences that he had had with Jesus, I have to think that, in this moment, even though he knew Jesus was resurrected, he saw the empty grave, he was there when Jesus showed Himself to Thomas, I still have to believe that Peter is still struggling a little bit with the fact that he denied his Lord...he denied his Lord! And, certainly, even though he had been to these incredible highs in his relationship with Jesus, these incredible experiences, I have to think that what he was overshadowed by, was overwhelmed with, was a sense of shame and guilt.

And so, I ask, in the midst of failure, are you inclined to run to Jesus? Peter dove in head-first. He had to swim to shore. He had to get near to Jesus. And it seems that Peter knows something that we so often forget. Peter knows the heart of his Lord, and he knows that the heart of Jesus is not to condemn, but to welcome. It's not to scorn or heap up shame, but it's to relieve. It's to restore. So, Peter swims to shore. What would he encounter when he reaches the shore? Verse 9:

So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire *already* laid and fish placed on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish which you have now caught.” Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, “Come *and* have breakfast.” None of the disciples ventured to question Him. “Who are you?” knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave *it* to them, and the fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead. (Vs. 9-14)

There are just so many little details in this short passage that I wish we could just linger on for weeks. There's so much to see here, but the one thing that we cannot miss is that, when the disciples and Peter arrived upon the shore, what did they find? They found **breakfast**...they found breakfast! Don't you just love that? They found breakfast Jesus was cooking for them. They found breakfast, and that certainly has something to do with nourishment, right? They were probably very hungry. They caught no fish. They probably thought, “Oh, now we're going to have to go hungry this morning. We're going to have to find food.” Jesus did it. He got breakfast cooking. But I think the breakfast is more than just nourishment. The breakfast represents fellowship with their Lord...fellowship with their very Lord...table fellowship with the One that just rose from the dead, the One who loves them!

When you fail, when you find yourself engaging in sin, that is just so frustrating to you. When you fall short, maybe even when you sin in such a way that you feel like it is a personal affront to Jesus, which all sin is, but there are times where it feels like we just take advantage of His grace when you do that. When you start to feel to yourself that maybe Jesus is as repulsed by me as I am by myself, do you know that you have a Lord? That Jesus' heart is one that welcomes you? It is one that invites you into fellowship. It is one that seeks to restore. And there is nothing you can do to break fellowship with Him. That is His very heart. Do you know that?

As they arrived at shore, they found breakfast, yes. But John includes this important detail: breakfast cooking over a *charcoal fire*. There are only two times where John tells us that the fire was a charcoal fire. Jesus was very intentional with that. Two episodes with a charcoal fire, two different outcomes, two different moments. One fire marked by a denial, and now one fire marked by a restoration...a restoration of fellowship. What do you think? For the rest of Peter's life, you know when he smelled a charcoal fire, maybe when he smelled fish cooking on a charcoal fire, do you think his mind went back to that moment, that moment of denial, or do you think it went to this breakfast on the beach? I think Peter loved the smell of charcoal after this. I think it reminded him of his restored relationship with the risen Lord.

What does it say about Jesus? What does it say about Him that, in the midst of our failure, He doesn't deny fellowship with us? He does not shrink back. His arms are open. He is ready to welcome. He is not repulsed. There is nothing that we can do that could turn Him away from us. He is ready to come to us. Rather than running, rather than doing what we are inclined to do, He does the exact opposite. He comes to us, and He welcomes us into fellowship with Him. That is who He is. That is His very heart. And as we wrestle with our failures, with the ways we've fallen short, even now, if we are feeling a sense of guilt and shame, do we know that we have a Lord that welcomes us? Oh, I pray that we know that. Even right now, I pray that God, by His spirit, would lift that burden from your heart, because your Lord loves you. He loves you, and he is ready to welcome you. It doesn't seem like the question to me is, "What will Jesus do with our failure?" It seems like the most important question is, "What will we do with our failure?" Will we run to Him? Or will we continue to believe a lie that He doesn't want to be near us? It's the voice of the evil one that tells us that, that tells us, "You know, Jesus probably would be disgusted by you right now." The voice of Jesus says this. It says, "Come and have breakfast with Me. Draw near. Draw near."

As John continues the story in Verse 15, it seems that Jesus isn't quite finished with Peter, and it appears that Jesus almost pulls Peter aside here, and this is just a little one-on-one talk that they are going to have. Verse 15:

So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend my lambs." He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." He said to him a third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep. Truly, truly I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me. Follow Me." (Vs. 15-19)

Perhaps that moment on the beach and that charcoal fire, that moment of breakfast, was intended in some way to just communicate to Peter that, despite the failures, fellowship with Jesus is absolutely available to him. I think, in this moment, Jesus was taking it one step further with Peter. It's not only that fellowship is available, but it's that Peter's failure has not disqualified him from the work of ministry that God, that Jesus, had given to him. It has not disqualified him.

I think so often that we, in our failure, can start to feel like: All right, I know the grace of God is sufficient. I know that when I die and I'll go to heaven, I'll be with Jesus because of the work on the cross. I know that Jesus accepts me. I can start to come to grips with that. But I think that my sin is probably too big to actually be used by Him. I think that probably my sin is significant enough, it's bad enough, I'm ashamed of it enough, that I don't think He can really use me in the work of ministry. I think I'm sidelined because I have been disqualified by what I have done. We think that way. What is very clear is that there is no failure that can disqualify us from the work of ministry that has been apportioned to us. There's a work that God is doing in the world, and Jesus is saying very clearly, "Failure is not final." It does not break fellowship, first of all. Second, "It doesn't disqualify you from the work that I'm doing in the world, Peter. There is work to do. I've called you to it. Be about the work."

Jesus is such a good teacher, isn't He? He's just so, so good. He brings these object lessons, right? The charcoal fire: very intentional. "You remember, Peter, the charcoal fire and the denial? I'm going to transform that memory for you. Here's a new charcoal fire memory. Peter, you denied Me three times. I'm going to restore you three times. I'm going to commission you three times. I'm going to come back in and speak to you three times, speak truth to you that you might know you are not disqualified. So, do you love Me, Peter?" "Yes, Lord, you know I love You." And then, three times, basically saying the same thing: "Care for the flock." "Shepherd the flock." "Be about the work that I've called you to. I have made you a pastor. I've made you a leader, Peter. Be engaged in the work of ministry that I have given to you. Don't listen to the lie that you're disqualified."

Failure is not final. There is work that is being done in the world. Jesus is actively pursuing people, and He is calling you and me to be engaged in that mission. So we cannot listen to that voice that says we are disqualified. We are not disqualified in Christ. He has qualified us. And so, for Peter, "Shepherd...lead...care...tend for my sheep, my lambs; care for the flocks...minister...lead. Peter, there's work to do. Care for those disciples that now exist. Care for those disciples that will exist." Three denials were followed up by three statements of commissioning, letting Peter know that his failure, even though Jesus was fully aware, right? (He knows everything. Lord, You know all things.) Fully aware, and yet, "You will have fellowship with Me, and there is work to do. Now, Peter, follow Me. Follow Me!"

And we do know that Peter did follow Him. All right, Peter thought maybe his story was finished, but Jesus makes it very clear his story is not finished at all. In fact, Jesus is calling Peter to a radical commitment, and we know that Peter would take up that call. He would be radically committed to Jesus all the way up to his death. And we know, from the Book of Acts, we know that Peter became instrumental in the work of God that He was doing among that early church. Just a short number of days later, on the day of Pentecost, Peter stands up before the crowds and he proclaims what God has done in Christ. And then in those days of the early church, Peter became so foundational in terms of just leading and shepherding the people of God.

And then, we know from church history and church tradition that Peter, in fact, did go on to be martyred for the sake of the gospel. Killed for the sake of Christ, following his Savior even unto

death. Radical commitment! I can't help but imagine that scene for just a moment. We don't know details about how Peter was martyred or whatever, but I just imagine that scene, that moment where they ask him, "Are you one of His? Are you with Him?" And Peter saying, "Absolutely, I'm with Him. I'm His!" The denial transformed into radical commitment. Commitment even unto death. God excels at radical reversals. He transforms our failures. He sets us "on mission" with Him.

Church, we will fail. I wish I could say we wouldn't fail. I wish that the way Jesus did it was: He saved us, He sent us His Spirit, He put the Spirit in us and indwells us, and then sinning is done." Wouldn't that be wonderful? But God, in His wisdom, has chosen not to do it that way. And so, we struggle against sin as we pursue Jesus, and we continue to follow Him. But the one thing we can be assured of is that, when the resurrected Lord meets us in the midst of our failure, He will meet us with an extension of fellowship. He will remind us, "Actually, fellowship was never broken." And then, He will say to us, "There is work to do. Now let's be about the mission. Now, come. Follow Me."

We don't have time this morning to finish this chapter. I'd encourage you to read these last six verses. Discuss them in your Life Group. It's an interesting interaction between Peter and John and just the relationship there. But, as we close, I do just want to ask you to consider for just a moment whether, in the recesses of your heart, in a place maybe only you know, maybe places that you're ashamed to talk to other people about, is there something in your life that you've begun to believe is too significant, is too horrible in your own mind, that Jesus wouldn't want to draw near to you? I want to say to you this morning, if that is you, that is a lie. Your Lord, the resurrected One, is not repulsed by you. He loves you, and He will draw near to you. In your failures, He is ready with open arms. The question is: Will you turn to Him?

If that is where you find yourself this morning, there are two prevailing messages we can take away from Peter's encounter with Jesus. And the first is simply that He offers us fellowship no matter what has transpired. No matter what has transpired, His arms of fellowship, His welcoming arms, His generous arms, are open to us right in the midst of our failure. We are prone to say, "Oh, I've failed that person. I should withdraw from them." He does not withdraw. He draws near.

You know, I was talking to Lane, who works with our kids—one of our Kids' staff. You know, our kids went through this very story last week. You should ask them about it. I bet they remember it. And, as they were talking about this passage, one of the kids said to Lane, "Why did Jesus say, 'Feed My sheep?' Why didn't He just say, 'Plant a church'?" And you know what? That's profoundly true. That's the point of the church. The point of the church is that we would come, and we would care for one another. That is the way the church is cared for, the sheep are cared for. We are all sheep, and we are the flock of God, and we are seeking to love one another and to remind one another that God loves us. God loves you. And when we hear one another say, "I love you and I welcome you," that is a gift of God. God is expressing His very love through His people.

I just want to remind you this morning, if you are here now, living in the shadow of shame and guilt, God does not intend that for you. And there are so many resources that we have as a church staff that we have to help you with that. There are times where we think we know this is something that people struggle with, and how can we encourage them to just take advantage of these opportunities, to step out of guilt, to step out of shame? So, I'd encourage you, whether it be spiritual care or a support group or Pure Desire or Celebrate Recovery, or just in your Life Group, to experience the beauty of loving fellowship that is Christ and Christ's people.

The second question, the second concern that we all might have is that we start to feel like: “Maybe I’m disqualified.” And I want to say to you this morning, there is no failure that can disqualify you from the work of God. God has a work to do in this world. There is no one in the world more active than Jesus Christ right now. And He is calling us to be engaged in the work that He is doing. Each one of you, right where you’ve been placed in your neighborhoods in your work, you have been placed there with purpose. And God wants to use you there to minister. Your ministry is simply the work of God, the work of the Kingdom that He has apportioned to you. He has given you a work, and you are not disqualified. There is no failure! There is no failure, Brothers and Sisters, that can disqualify you from the work of God. We have work to do. It is God’s very mission. That’s what we’re going to talk about more next week, the resurrected Christ and our mission.

But, as we close, I just want to remind you: the One who is risen, the One who reigns, the One who right now sits at the right hand of the Father, when He looks and He sees us in our missteps, He sees us in our failures, He does not see the failure. No, He sees His beloved child. And His heart is inclined to you, and He longs to draw near, to bring you into fellowship with Him, that you might be caught up in the work He is doing in the world, for the sake of His name and the sake of His glory. Thanks be to God for that. Let’s pray together.

Our Father, we are so grateful that, in Christ, you have reconciled us to Yourself. You did that which we could not do. And, Lord, we just ask that, by Your Spirit, You would give us the courage to run to You when we find ourself in the midst of ways that we have fallen short. Lord, may we be a people that run to You, that know that You do not forsake us, You do not withdraw from us, that there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. Lord, speak that to our hearts right now. Father, we ask that You also would bring to mind ways that we can be engaged in the work that You’ve called us to. As we think about that, prepare us for the works that you have prepared for us. Jesus, we thank You. We praise You. We thank You that You are our Lord who always welcomes us. And we pray these things for the sake of Your name and Your glory, Amen.

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Introduction

Continuing in the Gospel of John this week, the resurrected Jesus appears to seven disciples while fishing. A familiar scene for these disciples leads to a pivotal conversation between Jesus and Peter. Perhaps Peter needed special encouragement in the aftermath of his denial – he may have felt completely dejected. Yet the resurrected Jesus is ready to meet Peter, and us, in the challenging moments of failure.

To think through the main ideas in the sermon and prepare for your discussion together, we invite you to look over all the questions on the following pages and write your thoughts down before you meet with your group. Due to preferences over a wide range of groups, we do not expect you will cover every question each week.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

1. In which activity would you like a lesson from an expert?

2. Who is the most optimistic person you know?

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion.

- 1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
 - a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
 - b. For the fruit of the Spirit to be cultivated in your lives
 - c. For grace to hear and apply what the Spirit says to you

 - 2) Choose someone to read the passage aloud for the group.
-

Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

- 1) In verses 1-5, the disciples fish all night, some of them are professional fishermen yet they are unable to catch a single fish. **How defeated do you think Peter felt in this moment?**

Share of a time when you have experienced a moment of defeat in your life. What was a source of encouragement for you during this time?

- 2) The scene we see in verses 6-7 reminds us of an earlier scene in the ministry of Jesus, but there are some striking differences. Read Luke 5:4-10. **In what ways are Peter's reactions different?**

What has Peter seen Jesus do or heard Him say that might explain this different reaction?

What truth about Jesus from the first miracle do you think Peter is recalling in this second miraculous catch of fish?

- 3) In verses 15-19, Jesus calls Peter to be a shepherd, and He tells Peter it's a calling that will eventually lead to his death. Peter's ability to live on mission seems to be rooted in Jesus' simple question, "Do you love me?" Peter had denied Jesus three times (Matthew 26:69-75), and yet here Jesus is. **What do you think Jesus was trying to teach Peter by asking him the same question three times?**

Sometimes, it can be easy to beat ourselves up for past mistakes. **How does loving Jesus and trusting in His forgiveness help you put past mistakes into perspective so that they don't define your future?**

Share of a time when you felt stuck in your failures and it was a challenge to live in the forgiveness of Christ. How did God transform this failure into a step to follow Jesus?

- 4) In verses 18-24, Jesus tells Peter the type of death he would receive. Despite what Peter's future held, Jesus told him to follow Him. Immediately, he turns to John and asks Jesus, "What about him?" It is hard not to compare ourselves to others. **In what areas do you often find yourself comparing (e.g., finances, skills, appearance, opportunity)?**

How do you continue to follow Jesus in your life when comparison creeps into your thoughts and choices? Share suggestions as a group and pray for one another in this regard when you close your time in prayer.

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit—we invite you along each week to strengthen your souls with suggestions and prompts. **Next week in Life Group, take a few moments to share how the Lord may have used this exercise in your life.**

Prayer Focus: Breath prayers are a simple way of becoming more aware of God's presence. They are an opportunity to pray without ceasing. Compose a simple breath prayer to use whenever you find yourself stuck in comparison. (e.g., Jesus, help me follow you.) The words need not be eloquent or impressive; breath prayers are not mantras to be repeated mindlessly or magic incantations. Find a short sentence or phrase that you can offer to God who is able and willing to help us.

Scripture Focus: Defeated thoughts can creep into any area of our lives. We may feel like we've failed as a friend, spouse, or parent when we let mistakes of the past determine our worth. In these moments we can choose to change our thoughts about failure. Choose one of the following verses to meditate on this week when you feel like you've failed. Let these verses encourage and strengthen you. We are not failures. We are victorious through Jesus!

Proverbs 24:16

Philippians 3:12

Psalms 37:23-24

Philippians 1:6

Psalms 103:13

Prayer *(Suggested time: 20 min)*

A significant part of “coming together” is being open and honest with our lives. Sitting in a group of people for prayer may be new or it may be familiar to you. If you would rather not pray aloud when it is your turn, feel free to pray silently and then say “Amen” aloud signaling the next person in the group to pray. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request. What did the message, working through the above questions or the discussion cause you to notice about your own relationship with Jesus? Would you be willing to share your prayer request with the group?