

Good morning! When we think about the disciples, we usually think about Peter first. He was the first leader in the church and so he was sort of a figurehead of the early days of the Christian Movement. Peter loved the Lord ...but he was also a failure at loving Him. We read (in Matthew 26:35) Peter's declaration that he would gladly die for Jesus. In fact, all of the disciples said they would and yet there were none to be found---not a single one--- when it was time for Jesus to go to the cross. I wonder how I would do in that situation--- have you ever wondered how you would do? This morning, let's look in on another familiar scene; a scene that took place only a few weeks after Jesus was abandoned by all of His followers:

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "You know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

John 21:15-19

This conversation took place after the resurrection, after the disciples, those glorious examples of commitment to Christian mission, had followed Peter back to fishing. Jesus had come to them and fixed them breakfast over a campfire on the beach. I often think about this passage, this interaction between Jesus and Peter. I think Peter was haunted by the way he had failed Jesus when the chips were down.

When Peter told Jesus he would rather die than deny Him, he really meant it---but he didn't know himself and when the time came, he failed. Jesus knew Peter---as He knows each of us--better than Peter knew himself. Peter's failure was that when trouble came, he took care of himself. That's not the kind of love that Jesus wants to teach us, is it? In this passage, Jesus, God of the Second Chance, is offering Peter his second chance----a chance to learn the Jesus kind of love, sacrificial love. This kind of love isn't instinctive; it's not in our DNA. It's counter-intuitive, counter cultural. It says, 'I will care for others even when it costs me.' When Jesus says, "Follow Me!" at the end of the passage, that's what He means. Following Jesus doesn't mean follow me to church---He means, "Follow Me and do what I am doing." And what is He doing? Binding the broken-hearted; caring for those who cannot care for themselves, often at great personal cost. Are you following Jesus, really following Jesus this morning?