



Rev. Carolyn K. Hetrick
3rd Sunday of Easter: May 5, 2019
Sermon Title: "In Danger of Failing"
Gospel: John 21:1-19

**In this graduation season, I almost hesitate to say a scary word-"Failure."
It's every parent and student's worst nightmare, being "in danger of failing."
No matter young or old we are the fear is the same.
Poor Peter is in danger of failing. Still. But it's complicated.
He is legitimately struggling. Jesus was arrested, and Peter denied knowing him,
and Jesus died but then rose, and Peter has seen the Risen Christ-twice.
And received the Holy Spirit. Those moments felt great, but it's not exactly clear
to Peter or the others what that is supposed to mean.
Who is he now? What is he supposed to do now?
If you have ever asked yourself these questions, we are in good company with
Peter. When you've come home from school, or deployment in the military, or
just retired, or experienced a loss or transition, it's the question,
"what do I do now?"
Peter does what he knows. He goes back to fishing.
At least he's going through the motions of moving forward.
But it feels empty.
To top it off, Jesus shows up and calls Peter and others "children," adding,
"you haven't caught anything, have you?"
That stings. They are empty handed- no fish.
With empty stomachs- after working all night. And there is that other emptiness-
that they are still not sure who they are or what to do now.
Jesus fills the empty places.**

**First, he fills that net with fish. Suddenly, Peter knows what to do- he sees Jesus
and he doesn't wait for that slow, heavy boat, he dives in to swim to shore- first!
I bet the other disciples just loved that.**

**Then they arrive, and see that Jesus is ready to fill their stomachs. He has food
and a fire and asks them to get some of the fish. So of course Peter, pulls in the
whole net, and you know he counted those fish. Lord, Look!
If there's extra credit being offered, Peter is on it!**

As if these things will fill the empty places- busy work, overachieving.

Perhaps Peter is still trying to reassure Jesus that he is a good disciple after all. After failing. He remembers the gaping hole of separation from that journey to the cross. Where he wondered, "What am I supposed to do now?" Peter has boldly asked before- "Lord, where are you going? Why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you!" But then he doesn't.

These things are still in Peter's mind even though, the first time Jesus comes he tells the disciples not to hold on to sins, and past hurts. Even though Jesus' first words are "Peace be with you." Be at peace. Even though Jesus came again and met doubts with compassion.

It's easier said than done to move on, much less move forward. Especially if we think that the main question is- What do WE have to do? Because if we can't, it feels like failure.

Jesus tells us to proclaim what HE Has done.

Jesus came to the disciples proclaiming peace and forgiveness, and this is entrusted to us. Not the power to decide who is forgiven, the power to proclaim God's forgiveness. Now Jesus says- Love.

He asks Peter after he's been fed, physically and spiritually, "Do you love me more than these?"

It could be a competitive question- Do you think you love me more than these other disciples do? After all Peter has been over-functioning for Jesus.

More likely, do you love me more than this fishing life? Your life.

Peter, do you love me?

Do you love ME more?

Someone once observed that if she's being honest, she is more of an admirer of Jesus than a follower. (Suzanne Guthrie, "Edge of Enclosure").

Following is about setting "me" aside. Loving Jesus more.

We're all in danger of failing. And here come those feelings again- regret, shame, guilt, even a gnawing emptiness.

The good news, the resurrection and new life news is that if it take THREE TIMES for Jesus to come to Peter to get him moving again, Jesus will do that and more. Peter eventually rises, going on to be a force for the gospel and a "saint" in the church, not in spite of his character flaws, but because of them. And no failure gets the last word.

And the same is true for us. Jesus comes to us to feed us, to forgive us, and to remind us that we are given a new life, not just another chance at the same old life.

The grace of the cross assures us- We who have been fed, and shepherded, and filled are uniquely qualified to show one another God's overwhelming love not by dwelling upon our failures or the failures of others, but by rising to a new life.

I really do believe that often the hardest thing to overcome can be our own self-identity, and our own personal judgment. I bet if I asked you, you could tell me the failures over which you have ruminated in life. We can feed a pain even though doing takes an incredible toll. These things can so fill us that there is no room for anything else, while we lament an emptiness of feeling unloved. It creates an aching gap. I think Peter felt that still.

But Jesus shows up to offer Peter restoration that day on the beach.

And offers the same for us.

One “church-y” word for that is “Absolution.”

It’s more than “it’s ok,” it’s filling and restoring all the empty places.

Richard Rohr, in his book *Breathing Under Water*, notes:

Some of us have trouble accepting the absolution offered by God through the church...We cling to the self-identity our sin offers us...We refuse to believe that the Holy Spirit can work in us, heal us and transform us...

Developing a mindset of forgiveness rather than resentment can help...

Forgive us our sins as we forgive others...God’s totally positive and lasting way of removing our shortcomings is to fill the hole with something better and more satisfying.”

And there may not be any sand on the floor here, but friends, Jesus is calling to us to the shore. Knowing we struggle with our griefs and our ability to forgive, whether it be ourselves or others. Jesus knows the places where we can’t move forward.

But, today Jesus feeds us so we may be restored.

Jesus invites us to the meal where he is present to assure us-

God’s peace and love and forgiveness are ours.

Jesus comes to feed us and to fill the empty places sin creates.

This doesn’t have to come from our own efforts, in fact it can’t.

But again this day, Jesus loves us into this.

And then chooses us to follow him.

It’s more than just admiring him.

We who have been fed and loved are now sent to feed and love as Jesus does.