May 3, 2015

John 21:15-19

Resurrection Stories

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John 21:15-19 NRSV

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.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” A second time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.  Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.” He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God. After this he said to him, “Follow me.”

The night before Jesus died, Peter denied knowing Jesus three times. So this is later, after Jesus resurrection, when Jesus appears on the beach where Peter and the other disciples were fishing. Jesus is reinstating Peter into the fold by asking him three times to take care of his sheep. Three times Jesus asks Peter to confess his love and three times Peter professes his love for Jesus.

Jesus is inviting Peter to confess. Jesus is wiping away the three times that Peter denied him. And Peter is transformed because of Jesus’ forgiveness. He is transformed into the person who will be the rock that will be the foundation of the church. One of my favorite sayings is that the church is not a museum for saints, but a hospital for sinners. The foundation of the Christian Church is someone who really messed up, and yet Jesus forgave him, Jesus transformed him into the rock of the Christian Church.

Has anyone here ever messed up? I fall short of who God wants me to be every single day. I really identify with the Apostle Paul’s words in Romans 7:15 and 7:20, “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.” Do you identify with Paul’s words too?

When I was 6 years old I didn’t want to go to ballet practice.  It was time to go and I was all dressed and my mom was ready, but I had decided that I did not want to go.  I have this image of my mom across the living room telling me that we were going, and I looked at her and I yelled, “I don’t want to go.”  Then I said this word and I have never ever since said it to my mother.

“I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.” This next week my husband Lee and I will celebrate our 15th anniversary! I am not quite sure how it is possible that we got married 15 years ago, but somehow it is. My husband Lee is not a yeller. But I sometimes get a little bit passionate about things and I will never forget very early in our marriage when I was trying to get a fight started and Lee looked at me and said, “Are you trying to pick a fight with me?” Since then I have tried really hard, not always successfully, to not pick fights with my spouse.

Every single day when I mess up, I have to remind myself that I am a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), that God has forgiven me, that I can forgive myself, that I am called to forgive others. In our scripture, Jesus not only forgives Peter, he invites him into the work of the church. We are a people saved by grace who are called to love, who are called to make a difference. Jesus forgives us when we fall short, Jesus calls us to try again, and Jesus gives us meaningful work to do.

At our baptism we are commissioned to share in the work and ministry of Jesus. Every single day. How we are and what we do Monday-Friday at work or at school is just as important to our faith as coming to worship on Sunday. We are called each moment of each day to care for the people and the world that God loves so much. We are called as Christians, as members of Greenland Hills, to serve our world. How we treat the person who bring us food in a restaurant is important. How we treat the grocery check-out person is important. How we treat people that we don’t like is important. How we treat people who are mean to us is important. And we are called to forgive the parents who don’t accept us, we are called to forgive the partner who has hurt us, we are called to forgive our brother or sister who has been mean to us, we are called to forgive our boss and our coworkers and our classmates. Sometimes we are the only Bible that people will ever read. Sometimes we are the only Bible that people will ever read. For the mail delivery person, the barrista at Starbucks, the cashier at the movies, the janitor at your school, the driver who cuts you off in traffic… The people you interact with every day are the people who interpret your words and actions into the words and actions of Jesus.

The reality of forgiveness means that with God dead people don’t stay dead and broken people don’t stay broken. And God’s forgiveness shows us that there is always light, there is always hope, there is always the possibility of resurrection. God forgives us, and God is telling us to forgive others because our work in the world is important. And we will fall short every single day. But Jesus does not give up on us, ever. When we fail, Jesus invites us to try again, and try again, and try again, and gives us the gift of the church, of this church, where our brothers and sisters in Christ will give us encouragement and support.

There is a great painting at St. Paul’s Cathedral in London called “The Light of the World” by William Hunt. Jesus is holding a lantern in one hand and with the other hand is knocking on a door. I remember looking at it and realizing that the door did not have a handle or a doorknob. The door can only be opened by the person on the other side. Jesus can’t open the door for us. Jesus is standing at the door of our hearts, knocking. We have to open the door. And when we answer and when we open the door of our hearts and the door of our lives to Jesus, Jesus has two questions for us: “Do you love me?” and, if so, “What are you doing to do about it?”