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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH
ELKHORN, NEBRASKA
FEBRUARY 3, 2008
PASTOR MIKE BREEN

1 PASTOR BREEN: Thank you. It is great to be here
2 with you this morning again and a particular pleasure being
3 with you throughout the week.

4 I have meet so many great people, several new
5 people, and really enjoyed that, so that was great.

6 This morning we are going to do something a little
7 different with the Bible; we are going to read it.

8 And there's a little difference between reading it
9 and looking at it.

10 We often look at the Bible in church, but today we
11 are going to read it.

12 I'm going to read it with you and just pause you as
13 we go through the reading today, and I'll make a few
14 expository thoughts.

15 Expository means -- I'm not actually sure what it
16 means, but it sounds good.

17 (Laughter)

18 Where we are going to start is in John, Chapter 21.
19 If you would find that, that would be great. John, Chapter
20 21. With the Bibles open in front of us, let's pray.

21 Lord Jesus, this is your word. Jesus, you are the
22 living word, and we ask you now, Living Word, that you would
23 reveal yourself in the written words.

24 And we pray, Lord, that as you reveal yourself,
25 Lord, you would show us how it is that we should follow you.

1 And we pray it, Jesus, in your name. Amen.

2 I'm going to read and I would invite you to join me
3 in that reading.

4 Then I'll just pause every now and again to make a
5 few comments.

6 "Afterwards, Jesus appeared again to his disciples
7 by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way.

8 "Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathaniel from
9 Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples
10 were together.

11 "'I'm going out to fish,' Simon Peter told them, and
12 they said, 'We'll go with you.'

13 "So they went out and got into the boat, but that
14 night they caught nothing."

15 Jesus has been raised from the dead. The great epic
16 story of salvation is completed in Jesus coming alive again.

17 Peter and John were called by the women who first
18 saw Jesus alive.

19 Mary Magdalene and her friends had gone to the tomb
20 early on that Sunday morning.

21 Mary had spoken with Jesus. They all came back to
22 the disciples in the upper room to tell them, to testify the
23 Lord is alive, and so Peter and John ran to the tomb.

24 And as they are running to the tomb, John, being the
25 younger, gets there first.

1 Peter, being the more brash and bold, does not pause
2 at the door of the tomb, which now lies open, a two ton rock
3 is rolled away.

4 Peter rushes into the tomb and looks around. John
5 looks and sees that Jesus has been raised from the dead.

6 Now, what he sees is this. The grave clothes that
7 have been wrapped around Jesus, like the cocoon that wraps
8 around the butterfly that will soon emerge, have collapsed in
9 on themselves.

10 They have not been unwrapped, they have not been
11 unraveled, they have simply collapsed in on themselves
12 because that which was within them is no longer there, and
13 it's clear, it says in the text, they were in their folds.

14 It means simply this. The only way Jesus got out of
15 those grave clothes was to be resurrected through them.

16 So Jesus was resurrected through the grave clothes
17 and John looked at that and he knew what had happened and it
18 says he saw and he believed.

19 Later that day Jesus comes to the upper room. The
20 disciples are terrified.

21 He says peace be with you, obviously because they
22 are afraid.

23 He eats fish in front of them so that they know it's
24 not a ghost.

25 And he speaks to his disciples with clarity and with

1 consistency, revealing that he is the one that they have
2 known for these last three years.

3 He comes again and shows himself to Thomas,
4 revealing the prints in his hands and his feet from where the
5 nails have held him to the cross and Thomas believes.

6 And now Jesus says go to Galilee and wait for me
7 there because I've got instructions for you that I'll give
8 you when you get to Galilee.

9 So the disciples dutifully go to their homes,
10 probably to Capernaum.

11 But, you see, here is the thing. Peter has been
12 carrying the burden from the moment that Jesus was taken away
13 from him, and the burden is this.

14 He has failed Jesus. Peter has denied Jesus three
15 times in the presence of people who asked him directly, are
16 you a disciple?

17 He denied Jesus three times, and then Jesus, having
18 been tried and beaten, was crucified and taken away from him.

19 And although Jesus was resurrected, Peter still felt
20 a failure and the burden of that failure and guilt is
21 weighing him down.

22 You see, he had taken on a new profession, he had
23 taken on a new life, he had taken on a new calling.

24 He used to be a fisherman, and now he was a follower
25 of Jesus.

1 But he failed as a follower. He failed as a
2 follower.

3 What happens when people go through this spiritual
4 depression that is often caused by a sense of failure is that
5 they tend to go back to what they were before they started to
6 follow.

7 They are looking for something that makes them feel
8 like they are a real person.

9 They are looking for something with which they can
10 identify.

11 They are looking for something that makes them feel
12 like they are a real person again.

13 The thing that Peter could return to was fishing,
14 and so what does he say to his friends? I am going fishing.

15 For us it can be all kinds of ways that we
16 reidentify.

17 One of the most familiar things that happens when we
18 feel a little bit depressed is we go and find old clothes and
19 put them on.

20 Lots of people in this room have done that. It just
21 helps us feel like we are the person that we always used to
22 be. It help us reconnect.

23 That's what Peter was doing. He was putting old
24 clothes back on again so he could feel like he could do
25 something.

1 Now, the disciples around him only had one leader
2 among the disciples, and it was Peter, so they didn't have
3 another plan. They said we'll come, too.

4 So they spend the whole night fishing. They are
5 putting lights on their boats, they are attracting the fish
6 to the surface with the lights, and then throwing nets to
7 catch the fish, but they spend the whole night fishing
8 fruitlessly.

9 They find no fish and they do not even catch a
10 sardine.

11 Now, something is beginning to emerge in the
12 memories of the disciples.

13 Three years ago they had been fishing all night, and
14 even though they fished as hard as they could, they got to
15 the morning and they had caught nothing.

16 Three years ago, and maybe they never mentioned it
17 to one another, but all of them have that memory there in the
18 backs of their minds.

19 What was that? What happened then? Verse 4.

20 "Early in the morning Jesus stood on the shore, but
21 the disciples did not recognize that it was Jesus.

22 "He called out to them, 'Friends, haven't you any
23 fish?'

24 "'No,' they answered.

25 "He said, 'Throw your net on the right side of the

1 boat and you'll find some.'

2 "When they did, they were unable to haul in the net
3 because of the large number of fish."

4 What happened three years ago was that they had come
5 to the end of a fruitless night of fishing and Jesus,
6 standing on the beach, probably in a similar place to where
7 he was standing that day, called out to them, told them to
8 fish on the other side of the boat.

9 As they look they can hear a voice, they can't make
10 out the figure, he's indistinct, the mist is rising from the
11 Sea of Galilee, the Sea of Tiberias as it's called here.

12 They see an indistinct figure. They hear a voice.
13 Maybe with the trick of water he can see something that they
14 can't, he's only a hundred yards away, he says throw your net
15 on the other side.

16 They throw their net over the side of the boat and
17 maybe they think they have snagged the net because they can't
18 move it, and when they look it's full of fish.

19 That's it. I remember now. Three years ago we
20 spent the whole night fishing, we couldn't catch anything,
21 and then Jesus gave us a miraculous haul of fish.

22 John says, "It's the Lord."

23 Let's continue. Verse 7.

24 "Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter,
25 'It's the Lord.'

1 "As soon as Simon Peter heard him say it's the Lord,
2 he wrapped his outer garment around him, for he had taken it
3 off, and jumped into the water.

4 "The other disciples followed in the boat towing the
5 net of fish, for they were not far from the shore, about a
6 hundred yards.

7 "When they landed they saw a fire of burning coals
8 there with fish on it and some bread."

9 Peter has stripped to the waist. He's a working
10 man, he's doing the work of a fisherman, but it would be
11 incredible disrespect to meet even the closest of friends
12 with your chest uncovered.

13 So he takes his outer garment, wraps it around
14 himself, jumps in the water it's only a hundred yards, it's a
15 shallow beach, he could probably walk to the beach.

16 The rest of the guys are thinking, you go ahead,
17 Peter. We will bring the fish in.

18 And as Peter gets to the beach, there's Jesus
19 preparing breakfast, but here is something special.

20 Do you notice in Verse 9, when they landed they saw
21 a fire.

22 Now, in Greek, the original language of the New
23 Testament, there are several words for fire, but this word
24 here is only found twice in the whole Bible. Only twice in
25 the whole Bible. The word is anthrakia.

1 If you flip back to John 18, Verse 18, you'll find
2 the other place where that same word is found. John 18:18.
3 I'll read it to you.

4 It's where Peter is in the courtyard of the high
5 priest.

6 Jesus has gone away now to be tried by the high
7 priest and Herod.

8 John has gone with him. Peter is warming his hands
9 and it says this.

10 "It was cold and the servants and officials stood
11 around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was
12 standing with them warming himself."

13 The only other place in the New Testament where that
14 word is used is right there.

15 And the reason it's used in that way is because it's
16 a particular kind of fire.

17 It's the kind of fire that Pastor Mark is brilliant
18 at making.

19 We had a little lamb concoction last night. He had
20 gotten the coals perfectly up to the right temperature.

21 You see, what is being talked about here are
22 burning, glowing charcoal coals used for cooking. It's a
23 particular kind of fire, a charcoal fire on which to cook.

24 Only two places in the Bible. The first time is
25 when Peter is warming his hands in the courtyard of the high

1 priest and one of servants says to him, "Are you a disciple
2 of Jesus?"

3 And he says, "No."

4 They ask him two more times, so for the third time
5 Peter says, "I don't know him."

6 The only other place in the Bible where the same
7 kind of fire is found is when Peter comes up the beach to
8 greet Jesus.

9 So what has happened here? What has happened is
10 this.

11 Peter realizes that he has failed as a disciple. He
12 goes back to be a fisherman.

13 He spends the night fishing, but realizes he can't
14 be a fisherman because he can't catch a fish.

15 He's taken to the first day that he followed and
16 believed when Jesus said to him, I'll make you fishers of
17 men.

18 The day after a night of fruitless fishing they
19 follow Jesus from that point and Peter followed faithfully up
20 to the point where there was a fire of charcoal where he
21 warmed his hands and he denied his Lord three times.

22 And so in the moments between realizing they caught
23 no fish, and realizing it's Jesus, Peter has gone from the
24 beginning of his discipleship to the very end of it, and all
25 of the weight of his failure comes crashing down on him.

1 Let's read on. Verse 10.

2 "Jesus said to them, 'Bring some fish you've
3 caught.'

4 "Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net
5 ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so
6 many the net was not torn.

7 "Jesus said, 'Come and have breakfast.'

8 "None of his disciples dared asked who are you.
9 They knew it was the Lord.

10 "Jesus took bread and gave it to them and did the
11 same with the fish."

12 "This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his
13 disciples after he had been raised from the dead."

14 Just a couple of things. The first thing is this.
15 Peter is reacting like a person in panic.

16 People in panic, who don't want other people to find
17 out, are always the first to do something, because they hope
18 that by doing something they can cover the fact that
19 something else is not right.

20 So Jesus says get some fish. He says yes, I will do
21 that, because he's panicking.

22 He is seeing the fire, he knows he's a failure, he
23 helps the guys bring it in and there is 153 large fish.

24 Did you ever wonder why 153? It's a weird number,
25 isn't it? I will tell you why.

1 In all of the almanacs of the world at that time,
2 the almanacs are kind of an encyclopedia, in all of the
3 almanacs of the world at that time, when they counted up how
4 many different people groups there were, how many different
5 races there were on the face of the world, they always came
6 up with the same number. 153.

7 When Jesus called the disciples to follow him, he
8 said I'll make you fishers of men.

9 In just a few days now he's going to send them to
10 the whole world.

11 When they were sent they remembered that it was 153,
12 every kind of fish was to be included, every kind of person,
13 not a race is to be left out. We are going to the world.

14 The first time they get a miraculous haul of fish
15 there are so many fish that the nets break and they have to
16 call to their friends.

17 Remember James and John, and they come over and
18 help. That's the first day they followed.

19 On this occasion the remarkable thing is this.
20 There are 153 large fish, but the nets do not break.

21 What is it saying? It's saying this.

22 When you do not know Jesus, the reality of his
23 death, and the power of his resurrection, try as you might,
24 you'll never be able to bring in the fish.

25 But if you know Jesus of the cross, and Jesus of the

1 empty grave, whatever he asks you to do, though it be
2 enormous, you'll always be able to do it.

3 Because where he guides, he also provides. The nets
4 will never break.

5 But I'm not talking about either of those things
6 today, so that was just for your information.

7 (Laughter)

8 What happens next is that Jesus speaks to Peter
9 alone.

10 In my Bible it says Jesus reinstates Peter. I think
11 a good title for this passage here would be Jesus calls Peter
12 into the principal's office.

13 (Laughter)

14 Peter knows that in his heart he's heavy. He knows
15 that he has the burden of guilt and failure.

16 He knows that the memories that he wants to cover up
17 keep on bubbling up to the surface from his subconscious and
18 he can't get rid of the vision of the things that he has done
19 and he can't get rid of the pictures of the failure of his
20 past and it's like a burden that he carries with him.

21 And then Jesus says to him, Peter, just a word by
22 yourself.

23 Can you imagine? How does he feel? He is probably
24 thinking, let's get it over and done with. I can't stand
25 this any longer.

1 Verse 15.

2 "When they had finished eating Jesus said to Simon
3 Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than
4 these?'

5 "'Yes, Lord, he said, you know that I love you.'

6 "Jesus said, 'Feed my lambs.'"

7 He has drawn Peter aside into a private
8 conversation, but he addresses him not as the name he has
9 given to the disciple, but he addresses him with the name of
10 the person who Peter was before he was a disciple.

11 Do you remember where the name Peter came from?
12 Jesus gave it to him.

13 When Peter said you are the Messiah, you are the Son
14 of the living God, Jesus said, "Flesh and blood has not
15 revealed this to you, so I'm going to give you a new name,
16 the name Peter."

17 But the man Peter had failed to be a rock, and so
18 Jesus reinforces the reality that's in Peter's heart and he
19 says, "Simon, son of John," underlining the fact that he's a
20 man of flesh and failure.

21 "Simon, son of John, do you love me? Do you truly
22 love me?"

23 The word that Jesus uses is agape.

24 Do you truly love me? Are you prepared to lay down
25 your life for me?

1 That's the kind of love that Jesus is speaking
2 about.

3 Peter knows what Jesus is saying and he remembers
4 the conversation that is recorded back in John 15.

5 Jesus says this. "Greater love has no one than
6 this, that he lays down his life for his friends."

7 The word friend is the word philio, and you can also
8 use that and translate it as love.

9 And so Jesus says, "Peter, are you prepared to lay
10 down your life for me?"

11 And Peter says, "I'm your philio. I'm your friend."

12 And Jesus says, well, if you love me, then take care
13 of the first responsibility. As a leader of God's people,
14 your first responsibility is the children. The first
15 responsibility are the young ones, those who are young in
16 years and young in faith. Your first responsibility is to
17 take care of the vulnerable ones, the weak ones, the ones who
18 are unable to fend for themselves.

19 Your first responsibility, the first on your agenda,
20 the first in your budget, is the children.

21 It doesn't matter whether the people who have the
22 money or the power tell you that they are the first
23 responsibility, I'm telling you, says Jesus, it's the
24 children.

25 Feed my lambs. Jesus could have said anything, but

1 he said feed any lambs.

2 I don't know whether there is any debate about where
3 the money goes in this church, I guess it's like any other
4 church, just remember what Jesus said, first on the budget,
5 first on the agenda, feed my lambs.

6 Again Jesus says, "Simon, son of John, do you truly
7 love me?"

8 He answers, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

9 Jesus said, "Well, be a pastor then. Take care of
10 my sheep."

11 Literally the word means be a shepherd, be a pastor.
12 Jesus is saying, "Peter, I know you are sent to be an
13 apostle, because I sent you."

14 Apostle means sent one. Pastor means shepherd.
15 However far you're sent, says Jesus, be sure to be a
16 shepherd, take care of the sheep, tend to their needs, heal
17 their wounds, cover, protect, guard and guide them.

18 Verse 17.

19 "The third time he said to him, 'Simon, son of John,
20 do you love me?'"

21 Do you see what is happening here? Peter denied
22 Jesus three times, and each of those denials weighs like a
23 giant rock in the heart of Peter, and each time Jesus lifts
24 away one of the rocks.

25 Now, this is what Peter probably expected from

1 Jesus.

2 "Peter, let's just have a little word. What were
3 you thinking? What was that about? What were you trying to
4 do? Explain yourself."

5 But Jesus asked none of those questions. He simply
6 asked the question that is the most important question.

7 Because, you see, doing something for Jesus depends
8 upon being in love with Jesus. Doing depends upon being.

9 If we get into activity without truly knowing that
10 we've answered the question of Jesus, then our labor will be
11 fruitless and we will find ourselves chasing our tail.

12 Because Jesus is not looking for workers; he's
13 looking for friends.

14 He's not looking for people who do stuff for him;
15 he's looking for people who will be so close to him that they
16 will hear his heart beat and allow their hearts to beat with
17 his, and then you'll do things.

18 And Peter has had two of these boulders removed, but
19 each time his heart gets emptier and more frail.

20 Will he be able to stand? Will he be able to be
21 confronted with one more failure?

22 It's almost as though if he is confronted one more
23 time, he's completely weak, he's completely vulnerable, he's
24 completely in the hands of someone else.

25 You see, the reason that Peter denied Jesus was

1 because he thought he could pull it off.

2 He wasn't a coward; he was a fool. He thought, as
3 he so often did, that by will and strength of character he
4 would be able to pull something off.

5 So he's planning to spring Jesus. That's what I
6 think he's going to do.

7 But Jesus says, Peter, I don't want you to stand on
8 our own strength. I don't want you to come up with your own
9 plan.

10 I don't want you to be a self-made man, full of
11 self-determination and pride.

12 I want you, not in your hands, but in my hands, and
13 every time I remove these rocks that you cannot remove from
14 your heart so your heart rests more fully in my hands.

15 So Jesus asks a third time, but this time he changes
16 the words.

17 He began by saying, "Peter, do you love me? Are you
18 prepared to lay down your life for me?"

19 Peter responds, "Yes, Lord, I'm your friend, the
20 kind of friend that would lay down his life for you.

21 So then the third time Jesus says this. "Peter,
22 Simon, son of John, are you my friend?"

23 He uses the word that Peter has been using. "Are
24 you really my friend?"

25 This is the moment. This is the moment that will

1 mark the difference for Peter forever.

2 Will he fall into the hands of the living God or
3 will he try to pull it off for God?

4 Will he surrender his broken heart into the only
5 hands that can hold the broken pieces together?

6 He says, "Lord, you know everything. You can see my
7 heart. You know that I'm a friend."

8 He's saying, "Jesus, I know that you have been my
9 friend, because you laid down your life for me, and if you
10 are asking me, am I that, then yes."

11 Jesus says, "Well, you can feed my sheep then."

12 You see, for Jesus it doesn't begin with action; it
13 begins with relationship.

14 For Jesus it doesn't begin with what we do for him;
15 it's where we are with him.

16 Jesus knows the secrets of our hearts. He knows
17 these memories from the past that bubble up and cause us to
18 feel unworthy.

19 He knows these past failures and sins that from time
20 to time grip us again from the past and cause us to feel
21 condemned and guilty.

22 He knows our vulnerability. He knows our weakness
23 and he knows we are the kind of people with our brokenness
24 that we try to gather up the pieces ourselves and hold the
25 brokenness in our own hands, but we can't put it together.

1 So he says let me have all of the broken pieces, and
2 everything that caused the brokenness, and I will remove the
3 failure, and I will rebuild your brokenness, and I will hold
4 it together in my hands, so that your life, your heart,
5 though broken, is a vessel that I can use, and that's what he
6 says to us.

7 I spent a whole week with the church. It's
8 unmistakable the Lord is saying one thing.

9 It's time to go out. It's time to go. It's time
10 for us to reach out to those broken people who don't know
11 anything about Jesus.

12 It's time for us to reach out to those people out
13 there who think they know, but they are really lost.

14 It's time for us to do church outside of the doors
15 of this building.

16 But if we go, we must go knowing this; that the only
17 question that Jesus asks us is not how many have you brought
18 in, he doesn't say how much have you done, he doesn't say how
19 good have you been, he doesn't say how often have you avoided
20 failure?

21 He says this. Do you love me?

22 In this congregation this morning, and this is no
23 great particular revelation, there are those who find
24 memories from the past that bubble up, that entangle you and
25 make you feel unworthy.

1 And there are others who are here champing at the
2 bit wanting to do the thing that God wants to do.

3 To both of those groups of people Jesus wants to set
4 the starting line and it's this.

5 I love you. Do you love me?

6 Now, the maestro is going to come with his group and
7 they're going to sing, and I'm going to wait here.

8 It doesn't matter to me, and it doesn't matter to
9 anybody else in this building, in which of those categories
10 you find yourself.

11 But if it's time for you to go, and if you know that
12 in your heart, then Jesus wants to commission you with his
13 love.

14 So I want you to come and I'm going to pray that
15 prayer of commission.

16 And if you know that it's time for you to set aside
17 the things from the past and finally be released from burdens
18 that hold you, then it's time for you to come so that you can
19 be released into all that it is that God has for you, which
20 is far more than we can imagine or even conceive.

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