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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH

ELKHORN, NEBRASKA

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PASTOR MARK FRY

1 PASTOR MARK FRY: The third time is a charm. I want
2 to spend a little bit of time of getting into the context of
3 this story.

4 So if you have your Bible, I would love for you to
5 be in John 21 with me.

6 If you didn't bring your own, we do provide them for
7 you.

8 It would be real neat and maybe a spiritual
9 discipline to bring one so you can write in the margins a
10 little bit.

11 But what has happened in John 20 is Jesus does come
12 back through those locked doors.

13 And he greets the disciples and they welcome him and
14 there's that famous little thing, "Do not doubt, but
15 believe," and that goes on.

16 But it's just another chapter and we realize very
17 fully that doubt just keeps creeping in.

18 It doesn't go away. It always kind of keeps
19 creeping in.

20 Hindsight is 20/20, but discipleship is oftentimes
21 very foggy, and we see this very dramatically in this 21st
22 Chapter then.

23 You see, what is happening is the disciples are in
24 one of those places that they're sore and sensitive.

25 And Peter, the most outspoken of all of them, says

1 very succinctly there in Verse 3 I'm going fishing.

2 What I'm doing is not working. I'm going back to
3 the way it used to be, and he was a fisherman, and the other
4 guys are like we're going with you.

5 And so they get in the boat. They go out all night
6 and they catch nothing. You can't go back to the past. Not
7 successfully.

8 Anyway, they do that, and just after daybreak Jesus
9 is standing on the shore.

10 And they don't know it's Jesus because, as I said,
11 discipleship is kind of foggy.

12 And he calls out to them, and they don't realize
13 it's Jesus.

14 "You guys can't haven't caught anything, have you?"

15 And they said, "No."

16 And he said, "Try it this way. Put the net on the
17 right side of the boat."

18 These are professional fishermen that have gone back
19 to the way it used to be and they were unsuccessful, and so
20 Jesus does this, and you may wonder, why do they do it?

21 Well, what have they got to lose? My way is the
22 highway, basically is what he's saying, my way is the right
23 way. Do it on the right side of the boat.

24 They do it, but they don't know it's Jesus yet.

25 They do it, but you can imagine their failures.

1 And fast forward to Luke's Gospel, the 5th Chapter,
2 because here is this calling story of the disciples in their
3 initial stages of the journey.

4 And we see it in Luke 5, we don't have to read the
5 whole story, but what is happening is he's calling the
6 disciples. I'm right in Verse 4.

7 "When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon,"
8 that's Peter again, "put out into the deep water and let down
9 your nets for a catch."

10 Simon says, "Master, we've worked all night long and
11 we've caught nothing."

12 This is the first story that they are invited to
13 fish, and they do it and they catch so many fish the nets are
14 almost breaking.

15 And then Jesus says, okay, you guys are getting
16 pretty good at that; now we are going to fish for people. He
17 says it right away there in those verses.

18 He says, "Don't be afraid. From now on you're going
19 to be catching people," Verse 10.

20 That's the first part of the journey. They weren't
21 catching any fish, so they went to catch people.

22 Now, the last part of the journey we see in John 21.
23 They weren't having very much success catching people, so
24 they wanted to go back to the fishing thing, from failure to
25 failure.

1 Isn't that fascinating, the way those two stories
2 kind of bookend the life of discipleship that is so foggy.

3 We want to do it our way, but what Jesus very
4 pointedly says, he says you have to go to the deeper water in
5 Luke 5.

6 And in John 21 he says you have to do it on the
7 right side in the right way. You guys so quickly resort to
8 your own ways of doing things.

9 And you can imagine how much failures and
10 frustrations, they must have been thinking we're never going
11 to get fish.

12 But when they listened to Jesus, they experienced
13 some success.

14 Doing the same thing over and over again and
15 expecting different results is insanity.

16 But that's the way we are. We want to go back
17 instead of painfully forward.

18 So it's a great story. They hear the stranger's
19 voice, they're like what do we have to lose, we're sensitive,
20 we're sore, we've been beat up, we don't feel very good about
21 ourselves, we don't feel very good about the church.

22 But Jesus says do it my way. They do and it's
23 fascinating what happens.

24 You will see what happens here. They catch 153
25 fish. 153 fish. It's fantastic.

1 But right before that you'll notice in Verse 7, "The
2 disciple whom Jesus loved," that would be John, "said to
3 Peter, it's the Lord. When Simon Peter heard it was the Lord
4 he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and he jumped in
5 the sea."

6 That to me says he needs to be spiritually
7 rebaptized as a leader in the church.

8 Because, you see, it's totally counter-cultural to
9 put your clothes on and then to jump into the water.

10 The only person in the Bible who was told he needs
11 to be born again was a religious leader, and his name was
12 Nicodemus.

13 Religious leaders who experience failures need to do
14 it Jesus's way and be reborn. Isn't that cool? That's going
15 on in there.

16 He jumps right into the water, totally
17 counter-cultural, but here is where I want so zoom in, too,
18 is in that 9th Verse.

19 "When they had gone ashore they saw a charcoal
20 fire."

21 A charcoal fire. John is such a wonderful story
22 teller. Do you remember the other charcoal fire in the
23 Bible?

24 There is only one other one and we see it in
25 John 18, Verse 18.

1 This is right before the crucifixion story, John
2 18:18, "The woman said to Peter, "You're not also one of
3 those disciples, are you?"

4 He said, "I am not."

5 "Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal
6 fire because it was cold and they were standing around it and
7 warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and
8 warming himself."

9 The only two times in the Bible that a charcoal
10 fired is mentioned are Peter's failures.

11 He's warming himself, and then he's being fed by his
12 Lord, despite his failures.

13 Isn't that cool, the way those two little parts of
14 John's story kind of bring it all together.

15 So they have this cool breakfast together on the
16 beach. I would have loved to have been there. I have been
17 there. It's a wonderful experience.

18 They have fish and bread and Jesus gives them all
19 that they want, but notice how many there are.

20 Verse 11, "Simon Peter went aboard and he hauled the
21 net ashore full of large fish. 153 of them."

22 153 of them, that's a lot of them, and if you have
23 nothing to do, sit around this afternoon after Mother's Day
24 and you've got a stomach full and you're trying to take a
25 nap, add the integers 1 through 17.

1 One, plus two, plus three, plus four, plus five, all
2 the way to seventeen. You're to come up with 153.

3 Our church fathers, way back in the first and second
4 and third centuries, they were troubled by that.

5 Why was there 153 fish in there and not 152, not
6 144, a dozen dozen, what is the deal with 153?

7 Well, they interpreted that to say that there is
8 room for more in the net.

9 It isn't broke yet, but we need to fix the way we do
10 it. The net was not torn, but it was stretched.

11 You see again, we are the net, and frustrations
12 frustrate us, but they also make us grow.

13 That's what is happening in this net. The net was
14 not torn, but it was stretched.

15 There are growing pains. That's God stretching us.
16 Discipleship is not always comfortable. In fact, it rarely
17 is.

18 We are supposed to comfort the afflicted and afflict
19 the comfortable.

20 That was so obvious last night at this dance thing.
21 These homeless people came in. I was just honored to be in
22 their presence.

23 "Thanks for letting us be here."

24 "No. Thank you for being here."

25 They blessed us as much as we blessed them. When

1 the net is stretched, when we have growing pains.

2 So Peter, see, has gone from the frying pan into the
3 fire, you might say, from charcoal fire to charcoal fire, and
4 now he's there with Jesus and he is feeling like a total
5 failure.

6 And unfortunately in our culture, sometimes you have
7 heard, like the Apollo 13 movie, I love the movie, "Failure
8 is not an option."

9 That's true in movies, but in Christian discipleship
10 failure is a constant reality.

11 And if you have never failed, then you've never
12 stretched your faith.

13 You've never trusted Jesus if you've never failed,
14 because it's part and parcel of who we are.

15 Practice makes progress, closer to the kingdom of
16 God that is within us.

17 It's growing pains, you see. God doesn't call the
18 qualified; he qualifies the called.

19 Even failure Peter, who has gone from sleeping and
20 denying and failing, and here is he now being re-invited to
21 breakfast and now being instructed to go and love. It's a
22 great story.

23 Here is a little vernacular exercise that my dad
24 taught me.

25 There's a little expression, so you are going to

1 Chicago.

2 Listen to how the emphasis of that question changes
3 as I stress different words in the sentence.

4 SO, you're going to Chicago.

5 So YOU, Denise, are going to Chicago.

6 So you ARE going to Chicago.

7 So you're GOING to Chicago? I thought you were
8 coming from Chicago.

9 So you are going TO Chicago.

10 So you're going to CHICAGO? I thought you were
11 going to Portland.

12 Isn't that kind of a fascinating thing? And we can
13 so easily misunderstand what somebody says to us.

14 Now, let's try that same exercise with what Jesus is
15 saying to Peter.

16 "Do you love me?"

17 But we have to do this through the lens of who he's
18 asking the question.

19 He's asking Peter. "DO you love me?" I have seen
20 what you've been doing. DO you love me?

21 "Do YOU love me, Peter?" Even when you have had all
22 these failures.

23 "Do you LOVE me?"

24 "Do you love ME?"

25 Isn't that fascinating, and then to think back on

1 Peter's life, of hearing it in that way, and now think back
2 in your own life in that same way.

3 DO you love me? Do.

4 Do YOU love me? I've seen your life.

5 Do you LOVE me or just come and talk about me once
6 for an hour a week?

7 Do you love ME more than everything else in this
8 universe, the Lord your God?

9 That's the number one commandment. It's time to do
10 it. It's a spiritual reality check.

11 So in that context it's kind of fun to notice who
12 Jesus is asking.

13 He's asking Peter, and he's also asking each one of
14 us, and our answer depends on more than just lip service.

15 Yes, you know I love you, Lord.

16 Really?

17 Remember, I'm alive now, and I'm with you 24-7. Do
18 you love me?

19 Well, yes, you know I love you, Lord.

20 But now let's look into then, there is an age old
21 fallacy that we joke about, and I joke about it, too, and I'm
22 not good at saying I love you very much, and Wenda will
23 substantiate that.

24 But I told you I loved you when I married you 26
25 years ago, and if that changes I'll let you know.

1 (Laughter)

2 As if we don't need to say it three times a day,
3 with frequency, but then some of us just say it and our
4 actions don't fit consistently with what we just said for
5 those around us and for also our Lord and Savior who is
6 around us.

7 I love you, mom. Once a year? What is up with
8 that?

9 That's what our culture kind of encourages, we will
10 do this one day a year. We will honor you.

11 Graduates, we really love you graduates today. Do
12 you love me?

13 The great thing about kids is they have a crap
14 detector. They know when you're just saying it.

15 (Laughter)

16 And they can tell. Do you love me? It doesn't look
17 like it.

18 See, Jesus is asking them and us that same question,
19 and the way we answer then is by those three things.

20 Yes, three times. Feed my lambs, tend my sheep, and
21 feed my sheep.

22 It's interesting, because there is activity
23 connected to each of those three things.

24 There is doing stuff; there is tending; there's
25 feeding; there's feeding sheep and lambs.

1 We had just spent a week without showers and stuff.
2 There were great homecomings, so glad you're here, great to
3 see you, tell me about your trip.

4 One kid didn't have his parents pick him up. He was
5 a visitor kid to our church, but he liked to go on these
6 outings.

7 And he just kind of sat there, I'll never forget the
8 look on his face, this is before cell phones, nobody picked
9 him up.

10 He said, "Pastor Mark, can I have a ride? I like
11 riding in your car so much, can you take me out to my house?"

12 I said, "I'll be glad to."

13 He hopped in the car and I dropped him off at his
14 house, a big house, beautiful house, and there was a car
15 sitting in the driveway

16 And he kind of looked at it and went over to it and
17 right underneath the windshield wiper there was a card that
18 said, "I love you. Happy birthday."

19 He had turned 16. Brand new car. And the look on
20 this kid's face was really interesting to me, because it was
21 excitement and then it was the most hollow look I think I've
22 ever seen.

23 He looked at the card. "Thanks for the ride, Pastor
24 Mark," went into an empty house.

25 His dad said he loved him, but what he wanted his

1 dad's presence; not his present.

2 He wanted his dad to be there for him, instead of
3 working and bringing home more bacon, he wanted him just to
4 be there with him and bless him and give him a hug and ask
5 him how the trip had gone.

6 Isn't that what we need in a God? That's why Jesus
7 is asking Peter, do you love me?

8 I love you, and I'll show it, and you'll know it,
9 but you have to be receiving it, you have to be present in
10 the present.

11 Here where it gets really interesting. It doesn't
12 get all that complex, really. It's not that difficult.

13 How do we say that we love Jesus? He's very basic.
14 Feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep.

15 That's picking up after people; by sharing some time
16 with them; by smiling; by phoning; by just giving them small
17 gifts; by eating together, having a cup of coffee together.

18 I think it's just as simple as opening a door for
19 somebody.

20 I have been consciously doing more of that lately
21 and it's funny the reactions you get from people.

22 Mom is bringing kids in from preschool, or people
23 coming in with a cup of coffee or whatever, and when you open
24 the door for them they are just like "whoa".

25 But, you see, Jesus stands at the door and he

1 knocks, and it's really not brain surgery, but it is a heart
2 transplant, to just figure out it's as easy as that. Small
3 steps make for the greatest journey.

4 Is chivalry dead? People like to complain so.
5 Quite honestly, I don't care, because Jesus is alive.

6 We are supposed to do kind things for each other,
7 and take care of the lambs and the sheep.

8 The ones in the pen and the ones not yet in the pen.
9 That's the net, see?

10 We kind of mix some metaphors there a little bit,
11 but that's exactly what Jesus is talking about.

12 He said feed and tend and feed the lambs and the
13 sheep, the little and the not so little.

14 Tending and feeding sheep and lambs and loving Jesus
15 need to become holy habits.

16 And it's not reading, writing and arithmetic; it's
17 really these three Rs.

18 Repetition, ritual, and reinforcement.

19 Repetition. Notice Jesus asks him three times. Do
20 you love me?

21 We learn things by doing them again and again and
22 again and we make them true.

23 It's like my horrible golf swing. It's swing
24 memory. But the less I play, the worse I am.

25 The same is true of loving people. It's about

1 repetition.

2 It's about ritual. It's about developing healthy
3 and holy habits.

4 Notice whose sheep they are. He said tend my sheep.
5 They aren't yours; they're mine, and they deserve to be
6 treated like children of God, because that's what they are,
7 and he said it three times.

8 But it's about ritual; it's about doing it again and
9 again; it's be in the game and get in the flock,
10 reinforcement.

11 Hear him say I love you, and then hear him ask you,
12 do you love me, because he's never going to quit loving you,
13 ever.

14 There is a great scene in the movie "Goodwill
15 Hunting" where Robin Williams is finally having a
16 breakthrough with Matt Daemon, his client.

17 It's a powerful scene, because Matt Daemon is a kid
18 who really has some wounds.

19 Robin Williams has finally gotten an established
20 trusting relationship and he must say twenty times, "It's not
21 your fault."

22 And Matt Daemon is kind of like, "Yeah, I know."

23 "It's not your fault."

24 Each time it's a step further and further toward his
25 heart.

1 And finally he says, "Its not your fault," and then
2 Matt Daemon utters an expletive and they weep uncontrollably
3 together.

4 He's finally had a breakthrough, but he let somebody
5 into his heart.

6 It takes reinforcement. It takes ritual. It takes
7 repetition.

8 And he said the same thing to Peter, it's not all
9 your fault that you've failed.

10 A lot of that is just growing pains and stretching
11 stuff.

12 It's also interesting, Peter was a fisherman and now
13 he's invited to be a shepherd.

14 Isn't that cool? We are going to go out and catch
15 some people.

16 So it's Peter, and if you know anything about
17 agriculture, you know that lambs and sheep smell a lot worse
18 than fish, at least while they are alive.

19 So you know that's not the most joyous thing all the
20 time, and he's going to need some reinforcement.

21 And the rest of the story is fantastic that way.
22 Disciples are always learning from Jesus how to fish and
23 shepherd and love and die.

24 They're always learning how to be christs, how to be
25 little Jesuses running around, and also how to be christs, to

1 hear him say I love you; do you love me?

2 And he keeps wanting that penetration factor to go
3 deeper and deeper into our DNA, and deeper and deeper into
4 our souls, so it's just a way of life to open doors for
5 people.

6 We have to do it internally. We have to do it up,
7 and then in, and then out, but we have to do all three.

8 It's interesting, it's a special day, Mother's Day,
9 graduation day, Father's Day is around the corner, and they
10 always say every day is kids' day.

11 But in Christ every day is a holiday, because, you
12 see, it is after Easter now, two thousand years after.

13 And I close with a story. We went over to my mom's
14 for a week, and it was great, but it was kind of challenging.

15 My mom is getting older. She doesn't cook much
16 anymore.

17 She had her 75th birthday while we were over there
18 and we hit every restaurant in my hometown for either lunch
19 or dinner it seemed like.

20 She didn't have a grill, so I couldn't really cook a
21 lot. We cooked one night, but it was not easy. It's hard to
22 cook in somebody else's kitchen.

23 But about the second morning over there we were
24 going to play a little bit of golf, and my hometown has a
25 little nine hole public course, and my mom's retirement home

1 is right next to that.

2 You can walk down and get on the fringes of the
3 course, but you have to drive around to get to the club
4 house.

5 Anyway, I'm up ready to go and play golf. Pastor
6 Wenda is getting dressed, getting ready, it takes her a
7 little longer.

8 So I'm loosening up my shoulder, I have a rotator
9 thing that kind of plays up on me when I play golf.

10 So I'm just down there right on the fringes of the
11 course, just swinging my six iron, sort of stretching and
12 relaxing and stuff and all of a sudden there is a voice.

13 "Hey, you. You can't do that. You can't be there."

14 And I didn't know who it was, somebody at the back
15 door there, I kind of look over and wave to her.

16 And I'm swinging my six iron, "You can't be there.
17 You can't do that."

18 And I get kind of selective deafness, whatever, I'm
19 just kind of standing there like this.

20 She walks through the wet grass, got right in my
21 face and she said, "Who do you think you are? You can't be
22 here doing that? You don't live here."

23 I said, "Well, we're just going to go play some
24 golf."

25 She said, "Who are you?"

1 And I said, "Well, if it's any consolation my mom
2 lives in that unit right there."

3 Her face gets red. She goes, "Are you Mark?"

4 (Laughter)

5 And I said, "Yes. Remind me who you are."

6 She told me who she was. She was on my paper route
7 when I was a little kid.

8 (Laughter)

9 And for the rest of the time there her and her
10 husband would be in their golf cart and she was waving to me
11 like long lost buddies.

12 But it was like, oh, you're related to somebody.
13 You can be here.

14 What is God trying to teach me about the lambs and
15 the sheep?

16 And how do we as a church communicate you can't be
17 here. You don't belong here. You're not a member of our
18 club. You can't do that here.

19 We aren't born in; we are reborn in, and the lambs
20 and the shepherd and the sheep don't know biology.

21 It's about grace, and it's about love. It isn't
22 about you're not swinging the club right, or you're not a
23 member of the club.

24 It's come on in, and while you are in we are going
25 to open doors for each other, we are going to open our hearts

1 to each other, and we are going to do more than just talk
2 about it.

3 We are going to actually do it, because, you see, we
4 have to first hear Jesus say I love you. Do you love me?

5 You bet, Lord. Give me another shot at it. I want
6 a mulligan on that one, and we are going to do it
7 differently, you see, because it's not just our words; it's
8 our actions with our words.

9 I am going to pray and then there are going prayer
10 ministers out on the fringes if you want some individualized
11 prayer, and also in the chapel.

12 Pastor Wenda is going to come up in a moment and
13 answer any questions and give you a little talk about the
14 bishop nomination thing.

15 Let's pray. Lord, today is a holiday. We thank you
16 that every day with you is holy ground.

17 We have been, and some of us are, in the pits;
18 sensitive and sore, scared.

19 We've failed; we've not done things as we want to
20 do, or we've done too much.

21 Lord, thank you for breakfast, and thank you for
22 speaking to us, and asking us if we love you.

23 We want to say yes, Lord, with all of our hearts.
24 So keep working with us, would you, Lord?

25 Keep forgiving us, keep leading us, keep us warm by

1 the charcoal fire of your grace. In your own risen name,
2 amen.

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