



Easter Sunday, April 5, 2015
Pastor Mark Toone
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

Second Chances

John 21:1-19

Good morning! I'm so glad you chose to celebrate this joyous day with us. But fair warning: I'm going to start my Easter message with a disturbing video. This is for mature audiences only. Wives... you might want to cover your husband's eyes; this could be too painful for them. *[Video of last play of Super Bowl.]*

We were all in shock, right? We could hardly believe it. All they needed to do was hand the ball to Marshawn! But instead, that pass! And just like that... it was over. You know what we needed at that moment? We needed the referee to blow the whistle and do this. *[A reverse 'traveling' signal.]* "Back it up! Second chance! Redo! Try that one more time... and this time, just give it to the Beast!" We needed a "Second Chance" call, right?

Unfortunately, there is no such call in football. But welcome to Second Chance Sunday. On Friday, they crucified the greatest human being ever to walk the earth. When they laid Him in that tomb and rolled the stone in front of the door, it was obvious that Jesus of Nazareth was finished. Ahhh, but He wasn't. On Sunday, God did what only God can do. He gave life. He flooded that tomb with His Spirit and the dead body of Jesus gasped back to life. The resurrection of Jesus is the greatest second chance ever.

Easter is all about second chances! And no one needed a second chance more than Simon Peter. Peter thought he was such a hotshot. During the Last Supper, when Jesus warned that everyone would abandon him, Peter—in his typical, blustery way—rebuked Jesus. "I don't care what anyone else does, Lord... I will never abandon you. I will die for you!" "Really, Peter?" Jesus replied. "You will die for me? Actually, tonight before the rooster crows, you will deny you even know me. Three times!"

And that's what happened. After Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane, Peter followed at a distance. Three times strangers accused him of being a disciple of Jesus. And three times—with increasing passion—he denied he even knew the man. And then a rooster crowed. Peter looked up and saw Jesus staring at him from across the courtyard. He was so crushed with shame that he ran off and wept bitterly... so much for Mr. Tough Guy.

So even after the resurrection—even after Jesus appeared alive to his disciples—Peter still carried a deep sense of guilt. Wouldn't you? His head was spinning. And

so, he decided to do something familiar... something that always cleared his head. He'd go fishing. And in the dim morning light, Jesus showed up for one of the great second-chance stories in the Bible. I want to tell you that story.

¹Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way: ²Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ³"I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. ⁵He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. ⁶He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. ⁷Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water.

⁸The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. ⁹When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. ¹⁰Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." ¹¹Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn.

¹²Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. ¹³Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

¹⁵When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." ¹⁷The 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. ...Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

When Peter heard that Jesus had risen from the dead, it must have been a moment of drastic mixed emotions. An "Oh Wow! Oh No!" moment. "Oh wow, Jesus is alive... incredible, amazing! Oh No! Jesus is alive, and I've got to face him. I don't want to face him. I just want to hide!" After such a colossal failure, how could Peter

even look Jesus in the eye? He had his chance and blew it... big time. Surely, surely Jesus was done with him. Maybe that's what Peter was thinking when he decided to go fishing. Little did he know he was about to get a second chance.

Is there anyone here this morning who doesn't need a second chance? If we had the time—and you had the courage—I could go around with a microphone and every person here could name a point in your life you wish you could do over: a broken marriage, neglected kids, shady business deals, a destructive habit. I know exactly the re-set button I would press in my own life; it is one of my great regrets. And beyond the broken relationships or ruined reputations or squandered opportunities, there is a deep spiritual sense of guilt and shame. We realize we've let down not only ourselves and others, we've let God down. And even if we aren't sure there is a God, we still carry regrets about past decisions that weigh heavy on our hearts, don't we?

Well, Easter is the story of second chances; the opportunity to be forgiven; to start over, unburdened by guilt. Jesus was God's second-chance offer to humanity; God saying, "I know you've blown it. I know you feel ashamed, but I sent my only Son to set things right. You want a second chance? Jesus is your guy!"

And this story shows how eager Jesus is to offer a second chance. Notice his initiative. Jesus comes to them, not the other way around. Jesus finds them when they are slipping back into their old ways of life. Jesus makes breakfast for them. It is all Jesus. He knows they are embarrassed... that they don't know what to say, that they can't bring themselves to look him in the face. He knows Gethsemane haunts them as the most cowardly failure of their lives. They are paralyzed, so Jesus moves toward them!

We see it in his conversation with Peter. Jesus leads with questions! He doesn't come out guns blazing: "Well, Peter, you blew it, didn't you? Some kind of Rock you turned out to be! You promised to die for me. That didn't happen, did it?" No, he leads with a tender question: "Peter, do you love me?" He doesn't even say, "Peter, I love you!" That might have produced guilt. No, he gives Peter the first shot. "Do you love me?"

And how many times does he ask that question? Three. Why? Well, how many times did Peter deny Jesus? For every time he swore, "I don't even know the man," Jesus gives a second chance to affirm his love. It was painful, but Jesus kept pressing in.

And there's even more to this conversation that you discover in the original language of the New Testament. (Some of you are saying, "Oh goody...I have to come to church and now I get a Greek lesson." But hang in there; it will be worth it.)

There are different Greek words for “love.” The highest form of love is “agape.” Agape is selfless love. When we read “God loved the world so much that he sent his only Son to die,” that is agape love. Agape does what is right, even when it doesn’t feel like it. But there is another word for love: “Phileo”, the love of affection, brotherly love. Philadelphia is the “City of Brotherly Love”. Agape is the love of the will; it chooses love, regardless of how it feels. Phileo is the love of emotion; of feelings.

When Jesus pulled Peter aside, he asked, “Peter, do you agape me?” “Peter, do you truly love me with your entire being? Here’s your chance, Peter.” But when Peter responds he says, “Lord, I phileo you... I love you like a brother.” Jesus gives it another try. “But Peter, do you agape me?” Peter answers a second time, “Lord, I phileo you.” The third time, what do you think Jesus asks? “Okay Peter, do you phileo me?” Do you love me like a brother? And Peter responds again, “Yes, Lord, I do.”

Do you see what happened here? Again, Jesus moves toward Peter. He asks Peter if he is now ready to offer him the deepest sort of sacrificial love. But Peter still can’t go there. Maybe his own recent betrayal is still too raw for him. The best he can say is, “Jesus, I love you like a brother.” So finally, Jesus asks, “Okay, do you love me like a brother? I’ll meet you where you are. If you can’t yet love me here, I will come to where you are.”

But notice, Jesus doesn’t leave him there. His final words to Peter are, “Follow me.” Jesus loves us enough to meet us where we are, but he loves us too much to leave us there. He calls Peter higher. And in the end, Peter became the Rock... the person Jesus always believed he could be. Did you know that years later Peter was himself crucified? But because he didn’t consider himself worthy to die like Jesus, he asked to be crucified upside down. “Peter, do you agape me?” With his dying breath, Peter said, “Yes, I do!”

Easter is the story of second chances... of Jesus coming to us, not with words of accusation or judgment but with words of love and welcome and grace. If you need a second chance with God—and everyone does, whether you are the churchiest person here or the one who feels like he is sitting under the French fry heat lamp at MacDonald’s this morning—Jesus is making the first move toward you. He always makes the first move, because however you feel about him He agapes you.

But here’s the other half of the story; there is a limit to what Jesus will do. He makes the first move—he reaches out, he offers to meet us where we are—but at some point, we must move, too. We must respond. The most beautiful thing about this story is Peter’s response. When he realizes it is Jesus on the shore, he’s so excited, he can hardly contain himself. They are only 100 yards off, but that is too far for Peter. He was stripped down for fishing, but he puts his robe on and then jumps in the water. A little crazy... but he wasn’t thinking clearly. All he could think

about was, "Jesus is here. He is calling out to me. This is my second chance to make things right and I am not going to blow it!" Peter takes the plunge... literally.

But think about it. There were seven guys on that boat. Was Peter the only one who needed a second chance? His might have been the most spectacular failure, but every one of them abandoned Jesus in his time of need. They all slithered away in the darkness of fear. All failed. All were ashamed. All needed a second chance. But only Peter took the plunge. Why? Well, they had stuff to take care of. They had a boat that needed rowing back. They had a huge net of fish to be hauled in. They couldn't just jump in like Peter, could they? Someone had to be responsible.

But wait a second. Why did they have the fish in the first place? Jesus gave them that catch. Did they really think he couldn't do it again? They held on to the things Jesus had given them instead of rushing to shore to hold onto Jesus himself. How many of us never take our second chance with the Lord because we are too busy clinging to the things of this life?

It's like the monkey trap. Have you heard of it? In India, monkeys run wild. When they want to catch one, here's what they do. They take a jar with a mouth big enough for the monkey to fit his arm inside and anchor it to the ground. Inside, they put a small banana. And then they hide. When the monkey reaches inside and grabs the banana, he cannot pull his clenched fist back out of the bottle and refuses to let go of the banana, no matter what. The hunter comes out of hiding, slips a bag over his head and it's over. The monkey loses his freedom—and sometimes his life—because he will not let go of what he has in his fist.

All seven of those guys needed a second chance! All seven should have jumped into the water and raced to shore! Only Peter did. The others could not let go of what they had in their fists. Eventually they got to shore. Eventually, they shared a meal with Jesus. But it was Peter, in his longing to make things right, who had the conversation with Jesus that would shape the rest of his life.

Here's the plain truth. Every person here this morning needs a second chance with God. Because every person here this morning has blown it... more than once! There are many who carry a huge sense of guilt and shame who need to take the plunge but who, instead, cling to the bananas of this life. Today, this moment, Jesus calls to you and says, "I want to give you a second chance... forgiveness, freedom, peace, a love you have never known. That's what I offer. Will you take the plunge?"

What would the plunge look like for you? Well, you could come back tomorrow night, Easter Monday. We will gather in the Memorial Chapel at 7:00pm for worship, and then you are going to hear five second-chance stories from people whose lives were transformed by Jesus. Come back, listen, talk to these folks and see what God stirs in you. Or come back next Sunday, just one more time, at 9:00 or 10:47am. Come once more, find out about our 90 Day Challenge, and let God continue to stir in you. Or next Sunday at noon, join us for "First Step", the start of a one-class

membership process where you will learn some vital things about where you are in your spiritual journey and how you can move forward. Whatever your next step, I invite you to be like Peter. Take the plunge!