

“Love Will Find a Way”

John 21:15-19

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor
Smoke Rise Baptist Church
Stone Mountain, Georgia
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I wonder what Peter thought when he heard that the resurrected Jesus wanted to see him. How do you feel after you have disappointed and hurt someone and then hear that they want to talk to you? I think you know how Peter felt.

What did Peter do that was so bad? He denied knowing Jesus three times during the trial that preceded the crucifixion. Each time he was identified as one of Jesus' disciples, he strongly denied it even though he promised Jesus he would never be guilty of such cowardly behavior.

As a result, I think Peter received with mixed emotions the news that Jesus wanted to see him. He was certainly glad about the resurrection but he had to be apprehensive about the questions and lecture that were sure to come. I would have been.

When and where did that encounter occur? It was around an early morning campfire. The disciples had been fishing all night when Jesus spotted them. They caught nothing until Jesus told them where to cast their nets. Upon following his instructions, they filled their nets to overflowing and headed for the shore.

Once on the shore, they discovered that Jesus had prepared a fire and started cooking for them. After eating breakfast, Jesus turned his attention toward Peter, whom he addressed as Simon.

“Simon, do you love me,” Jesus asked, not once, but three times. All three times Peter responded affirmatively and each time he did, Jesus told him to feed or take care of his sheep.

Do you know what I find most interesting about this encounter between Jesus and Peter? **It was what Jesus did not ask Peter.** He did not ask him if he **loved himself**, for I doubt that he did. How do you feel when you have disappointed others and humiliated yourself? Do you love yourself? Chances are you don't and I don't think Peter did, either.

Furthermore, Jesus did not ask Peter if he **loved what he did** the night before the crucifixion. He knew Peter could not believe he had acted so cowardly and certainly did not like it.

Jesus did not ask him if he **loved how he felt** since the betrayal and crucifixion. No one cuddles up to guilt and shame.

Finally, Jesus did not ask Peter if he **loved what others were saying about him.** I'm sure many were talking about Peter's cowardly denials, even the disciples. The night they gathered in the upper room before going to the Garden of Gethsemane, they heard Peter's bold claim about loyalty and his willingness to die with Jesus. They knew what he said and later what he did. They were fully aware of the discrepancy. People talk about things like that, don't they?

No, Jesus did not ask Peter any of these questions. Instead, he asked, “Do you love me?”

Why do you think he asked this? I believe the answer lies in what the Lord's objective was. What did Jesus want to accomplish that morning with Peter? I think he wanted to repair the relationship with the leader of the disciples. He wanted to restore Peter's self-esteem and get Peter out of that fishing boat and back on the mission field.

Jesus knew that the world was full of people that had disappointed and hurt others. Strained and ruptured relationships were not in short supply. Too many people were carrying heavy loads of guilt, confusion and grief wondering if there was any hope or help for them. These people needed to hear Peter's story. He could feed their hungry spirits, nourishing and strengthening them to change their lives as he had done.

Why did Jesus ask Peter if he loved him, though? Only love could make all these things happen, Peter's ability to receive love from Jesus and genuinely return it. Love would find

a way to restore this fractured relationship, heal Peter's broken spirit and give him the confidence he needed to get back to work. This is because love is willing to do the difficult.

More times than I care to recall, I have listened to a marriage partner describe the pain in his or her heart because of betrayal. "What are others telling you to do," I ask. "Leave him and start a new life," is the usual reply. "Why haven't you?" I inquire. "Because I love him and don't want to walk away. I am not ready to give up. I love him in ways that others don't."

I've had similar conversations with parents about their troubled children. "Why don't you give up on them?" I ask. "Because we love them."

Love is tenacious, isn't it? It is tough, resilient, demanding and hopeful. It motivates people to do things they never thought they could and do not feel like doing. It gives people courage, confidence and determination. It enables people to be candid and honest. It melts cold hearts and breaks down barriers. It opens the door for repentance and forgiveness. It leads to healthy and wholesome changes in attitude and behavior. It finds a way to restore broken relationships and heals broken spirits. Ask Peter!

The transforming power of love was the theme of the last message Pope John Paul II wrote. An archbishop delivered it because the Pope was too weak. "To all humanity, which today seems so lost by and dominated by the power of evil, selfishness and fear, our resurrected Lord gives us His love, which forgives, reconciles and reopens the soul to hope."

Paul wrote something similar in I Corinthians 13, "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy. It does not boast. It is not proud. It is not rude. It is not self-seeking. It is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes and always perseveres. Love never fails."

"Love never fails." Jesus knew this, didn't he? It had not failed him. He loved Peter in spite of his cowardly denials and knew if Peter still loved him that this problem could be overcome. Love would find a way to make this happen.

Perhaps you can identify with Peter this morning. You have disappointed and hurt those close to you and are wondering if these relationships are permanently severed. I have good news for you. Broken relationships can be repaired if you will listen to your heart and let God guide you. Your story can have a happy ending, too.

Speaking of happy endings, it appears an editor added this final chapter to John's Gospel. This could easily have occurred since it is widely believed that the Gospel of John was composed in several stages over an extended period of time. Many interpreters believe the original version ended with these words, "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples that are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" John 20:30-31.

Why was another chapter added late in the Gospel's composition history? Evidently, editors could not end John's gospel without redeeming Peter. They did not want him to be remembered for his painful and disappointing betrayal but by the good he did after he was restored as the leader of the disciples.

Don't let the final chapter of your life and relationships be one of bitter failure and hurt feelings. Through the power of God's transforming love, find a way to repair damaged relationships and heal broken spirits. You will be so glad you did.