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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“PETER, RAISED WITH CHRIST”**  
**John 21:15-19**

You have got to love Simon Peter. He is the poster child for redeemed bumbler. No other apostle was so adept at snatching defeat from the jaws of victory; yet though he stumbled and fell again and again, Peter kept getting back up. He loved Jesus – not perfectly yet faithfully, passionately, ultimately at the cost of his life.

- Please turn with me to John 21:1-14.

It is a few weeks after Easter. Peter says **“I’m going out to fish,”** and six other disciples paddle with him onto the Sea of Galilee.

Keep in mind that he is just starting to recover from his worst failure ever. It has shattered his illusions of steadfast courage and undying loyalty to Christ. He doubts whether he is fit even to be the least of the apostles.

At least he is good at fishing, right? But they fish all night, and what do they catch? Nothing!

Early in the morning a stranger appears on shore. He calls out: **“Friends...Throw your net on the right side of the boat.”** It sounds stupid, but what does Peter know about fishing anymore, right? So they cast in their net and catch so many fish they cannot haul it in.

**“It is the Lord!”** exclaims John.

Peter impulsively jumps in the water and swims to shore. The other six follow in the boat, dragging the net behind. Jesus has already built a fire and prepared food. He gives them bread and fish for breakfast.

□ That brings us to verses 15-19. Because of what happens here, Peter, who has hit rock bottom, is **“raised with Christ”** {Col 3:1}.

1<sup>st</sup>, Peter is raised with Christ so that he might be restored.

■ Verse 15: Jesus asks Simon Peter, **“Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?”**

**“These”** could be the other disciples. Shortly before the Lord’s arrest Peter boasted, **“Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will”** {Mt 26:31, 33}. If Jesus is gesturing to them he is probably asking, **“Do you really love me more than”** they love me?

Or **“These”** could be Peter’s fishing boat and nets, the symbols and substance of his life apart from the Lord. If so, Jesus is asking Peter to consider whether he really is his disciple or just a wannabe.

Either way this question echoes another, posed to Peter a few weeks ago by a servant girl: **“You are not one of his disciples, are you?”** {Jn 18:17} T

That night Peter said: No, **“I am not”** **“one of his disciples”** {Jn 18:17}. But this morning he answers, **“Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”**

■ Verse 16: Again Jesus says, **“Simon son of John, do you truly love me?”**

This echoes the question asked by a second stranger that fateful night: **“You are not one of his disciples, are you?”** {Jn 18:25}

**“Peter denied it”**: No, **“I am not”** **“one of his disciples”** {Jn 18:25}. But this morning he answers, **“Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”**

■ Verse 17: A third time Jesus says, “**Simon son of John, do you truly love me?**”

This echoes the question from a third stranger that horrible night: “**Didn’t I see you with him in the olive grove?**” Peter lied a third time, “**and at that moment a rooster began to crow.**” {Jn 18:26-27}

But this morning he answers, “**Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.**”

The risen Lord asks “**Do you truly love me?**” once, twice, a third time, neither to rub Peter’s nose in his recent failure, nor to figure out for himself whether his fallen apostle loves him; he asks **so** that **Peter can be certain he loves Jesus**. He needs to know that his terrible sin has not forever disqualified him from following Christ.

The Messiah loves his people too well to allow guilt, shame, disgrace, and regret to fester inside us. He uses his Word, his Spirit, and human conscience like scalpels, cutting into our self-inflicted wounds to drain the poison and open us to his goodness.

It is a painful process! But if we receive his conviction with a trusting and teachable spirit, confessing our sin and accepting his correction, we will be reconciled once more to God. His abundant life will fill us again. We will be healed and revived.

Peter is raised with Christ that he might be restored, and so are we.

2<sup>nd</sup>, Peter is raised with Christ so that he might serve others in God’s kingdom.

■ Back to verse 15. After the first question and answer, Jesus instructs Peter: “**Feed my lambs.**” After the second in verse 16, Jesus directs him to “**Take care of my**

**sheep.**” After the third in verse 17, Jesus commands: “**Feed my sheep.**” (His “**sheep**” being those who “follow him because they know his voice” {Jn 10:4}.)

Do you hear the implied “if-then”? If-then statements indicate a direct, causal relationship. A is the cause of B. B is the consequence of A. *If you love me, then* “**Feed my lambs,**” “**Take care of my sheep,**” “**Feed my sheep.**”

This directive to “**feed**” and “**take care**” is aimed especially at pastors, deacons, and others who are appointed to nurture his sheep. Yet Peter is speaking to the whole Church when he writes: “**you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God**” {1 Pe 2:9}. All who say “Yes” to Christ’s invitation are responsible to care for each other within the flock, as the Holy Spirit equips us and provides opportunity.

The Lord of the Church takes this very seriously. Hence, in the book of the prophet Ezekiel we read this dire warning: “**Woe to the shepherds... who only take care of themselves! .... You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally**” {Ezek 34:2, 4}.

If we love Jesus, we must help to shepherd our spiritual brothers and sisters. We strengthen, heal, bind up, bring back, search for, and rule others with kindness by serving them in a spirit of *αγαπε* love.

Our service is God-empowered: {Lebacqz} **“We have the capacity for αγαπε only because of God’s love for us.”**

Our service is intentional: αγαπε is a matter of the will, so we serve others even when we do not feel like it.

Our service depends on the giver: we serve even the unworthy – not because of who they are, but because of who we are in Christ.

Our service is practical: we do our part to meet each other’s material, social, emotional, and spiritual needs, even as we maintain appropriate boundaries.

And our service is sacrificial: we serve even when it is inconvenient, difficult, unpopular, and dangerous; not that we want to suffer, but obedience to the Risen Lord is worth the hardship.

Peter is raised with Christ that he might serve in God’s kingdom, and so are we.

3<sup>rd</sup>, Peter is raised with Christ so that he might glorify God.

Verse 18: Jesus says, **“I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.”**

Verse 19 explains that this indicates **“the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.”** Some thirty years after this conversation, in about 64 A.D., Peter was led to a place of execution, his hands were stretched out, and he was nailed to a cross for insisting that Jesus is Lord and Caesar is not. Peter glorified God, even in his death.

The emphasis here is on honoring God by all possible means. **“You were bought with a price. Therefore [lit.] glorify] God with your body”** {1 Co 6:20}.

For the most part, we exercise this high and holy calling in the way we live. As we read in Romans 12:1: **“Therefore, I urge you, brothers [and sisters], in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship”** {Ro 12:1}. God is honored when we devote time, money, material goods, relationships, work, recreation, thoughts, words, and deeds – every aspect of bodily existence – to him and his purposes.

Such all-encompassing worship will bring us into conflict with the world, which tends to demand first place. In some times and places it brings persecution down on the heads of Christ Followers. Even then we are to honor God. As Peter teaches in First Peter 4:16, **“If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise [the Greek literally says, “glorify”] God that you bear his name.”**

But whether we pass away violently in a death camp or quietly in our beds, it is to the **“Father’s glory, that [we] bear much fruit, showing [ourselves] to be [Christ’s] disciples”** {Jn 15:8} even in our deaths.

Oh, to honor God in my birth, in my life, and in my death! This is my great vocation, and yours!

Peter is raised with Christ that he might glorify God, and so are we.

Simon Peter was frail. He was a bumbler. He often put his foot into his mouth, and his over-confidence frequently ended in failure. No other apostle was so adept at snatching defeat from the jaws of victory.

Yet though he stumbled and fell, Peter kept getting back up. He loved Jesus – not perfectly yet faithfully, passionately, ultimately at the cost of his life.

By God's undeserved mercy and kindness Peter was raised with Christ that he might be restored, that he might serve others in the kingdom, and that he might glorify God.

Hear the good news: If the risen Lord could do that in and through Peter, he can do it in and through you and me, too!