

## The Empty Tomb & You, Part II

Series: *Easter & You*

John 21:1-25

Chadron Berean Church

This Easter we've been talking about what Easter means for our lives in the here and the now. We've talked about the crown and how it means Jesus is our King. We've talked about the cross and how it is our way to life and the way of life. We've talked last week about what the empty tomb and how it means **a brand-new life and an eternal inheritance**. But if that's true—and it is—then that means we have a great task ahead of us to tell others about this good news and invite them into this wonderful journey with us and helping them walk in the newness of life. If you've experienced this new life, you know there is nothing this world needs more.

### The empty tomb also means a new mission.

Deep down, I think we all desire to live for something greater than ourselves. To be part of something that's going to outlast our life on earth. To be part of something that's going to matter forever. Our hearts beat for something more than just the nine-to-five and the weekend. They beat for something different, something grand, something glorious. They long to be part of a mission or purpose of some kind that is making a difference in the world restoring lives and relationships and bringing love, joy, peace, and hope to people.

But there's a problem. So many of us feel incapable and unworthy of being used by God for such a purpose. We live under a blanket of shame and guilt because of our past or because of what we've done and so we look at ourselves and ask, "How could God use me? I'm a mess. He knows me. He knows my failures. He knows my weaknesses. He knows what I've done. He knows I'm going to fail Him again in the future. Why would God ever consider using me? I'll trust Christ, but I think I'm meant to sit on the bench, on the sidelines, and cheer others on who have it all together." Well, let's talk about that way of thinking this morning from John 21.

*1 After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested Himself in this way. 2 Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. 3 Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will also come with you." They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing.*

So as John says, He is about to tell us about one of the many resurrection accounts of Jesus, and this is my favorite of them. At this point, Jesus has been raised and they are aware of that. The feast in Jerusalem is also over so they have made their way north to Galilee where Jesus said He would appear to them. They are then waiting for further instruction and waiting on the Spirit to come like Jesus said. The disciples must be feeling something like they're in limbo. A little confused and uncertain about what the future holds.

However, there is one disciple in particular who is in one of his darkest moments: Peter. Peter's soul is in anguish because during the night of Jesus' arrest, around *a charcoal fire*, Peter looked out for number one and denied Jesus three times. Calling down a curse in his defense, he denied knowing Jesus and Luke tells us that at that moment, the Lord, from where He was, could hear and see Peter, and turned and looked at him. He knew that Jesus knew. Because of this, I think Peter is emotionally tapped out. His once-confident spirit is now suffocating under the weight of failure.

You ever feel like that? I have. More than once. One of the things we do when we're in a moment like that is we go back to what is familiar. We just try to do what we know how to do and get by. For Peter and some of the other disciples, that was fishing, which they customarily did at night. He goes fishing, probably convincing himself Jesus could never use Him again.

Maybe you can relate to Peter this morning. You've blown it. You've failed. You're wondering if God still has your back, or, if He is repulsed by you and doesn't want anything to do with you. And you're thinking about throwing in the towel and walking away for good, going back to what's familiar. Or maybe you have gone back to what is familiar and experienced what these disciples experienced:

**1) that failure is contagious.** They went fishing all night and caught nothing. We can all relate. The only thing worse than smelling like fish after a fishing trip, is coming home empty-handed. One man said, "Failure is infectious, and pretty soon we find ourselves failing at everything we touch, until we finally feel like, "I can't do anything right." Ever feel like that? They're doing what they know, what is familiar, and still fail at it. It makes you want to sit on the bench even more. But deep down, I imagine that just like Peter, your heart longs to get off the bench and be used by God. You long for restoration. You long for a redemption story to come out of your failure. As much as the voice in your head wants to throw a pity-party and sit on the bench, you don't really want it to end this way.

**2) that life without Jesus is a lot like the disciples' nets that morning: it's empty.** You can pursue happiness in the things of this world; you can try to go back to what is less risky and what is familiar; you can even go fishing! But without Jesus, even fishing is empty—no matter how many fish you catch. I read a quote recently that said, "Many men go fishing all of their lives without knowing that it is not a fish they are after." Let's keep reading.

*4 But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 So Jesus said to them, "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" They answered Him, "No." 6 And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch." So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish. 7 Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea. 8 But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish.*

*9 So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it, and bread. 10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have now caught." 11 Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there*

*were so many, the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples ventured to question Him, “Who are You?” knowing that it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise. 14 This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead.*

Again, this has to be one of my favorite scenes in all of Scripture. I would have loved to have been there on that shore that morning. It’s a very personal time with Jesus for them. No crowds. No cameras. Just Jesus and the disciples having breakfast on the beach. A moment they’ll remember forever. We also see this fun, mysterious, and unpredictable side of Jesus. He’s just hanging out with them and having fun, kind of toying with them and discipling them.

I don’t know about you, but I long for a slightly unpredictable, mysterious, and adventurous journey with Jesus. As much as I sometimes hate surprises, I like to wonder about what’s around the next corner in my journey with Jesus. I like to think throughout the day, “How is God is going to show up today? When I’m on my way to work? When I’m at lunch? When I go fishing? How is He going to speak to me?” Just this week I crossed paths with someone twice (at a soccer game and at the coffee shop) that I think God put in my path. God used them to minister to me through our conversations. See I think if we will slow down and be alert—keep our eyes and ears open—we might just be surprised how and when the Lord is trying to get our attention or speak to us.

The disciples recognized when Jesus showed up that day in a unique way. One of the reasons for that is because they’d heard this request before to put the nets down again. In Luke 5, 3 years prior, in Simon’s boat, Jesus told him to let down the nets right after another night without bringing in a single fish. The nets filled so full they began to break! It was then that Peter recognized Jesus was the Messiah and told Him to get away from him. He said, “Get away from me, a sinful man.” Jesus said, “Do not fear, from now on you will be catching people.” Peter recognized this was Jesus again and, acting on impulse, jumps into the water and swims to shore first. It’s so Peter-like.

But there’s one point I don’t want to miss and that I want to bring out. Jesus did not need the disciples. The disciples needed Him. Without Jesus, they didn’t catch any fish. Before they caught any fish, Jesus already had breakfast made. He’s teaching them something, isn’t He? In order to fulfill the mission, we have to rely on Him. Without Him, we can do nothing. We catch nothing.

**We must rely on Jesus to fulfill the mission.**

With Jesus, John mentions that they caught 153 fish! Some people want to try and find some sort of meaning in that, but I tend to think it’s there mostly to say “this really happened and here’s how many fish we took to the market.” It may also be John’s way of bragging: Here’s *how many* fish we caught. He’s lucky the Israeli Game & Parks didn’t show up that morning.

*15 So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Tend My lambs.” 16 He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Shepherd My sheep.” 17*

*He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “Tend My sheep.”*

So there’s a lot going on here. Jesus calls Peter, Simon. This is Peter’s name before he met Jesus. Jesus renamed Simon to Peter—which means rock—which meant that he was going to be a rock for Jesus. I think it fit Peter’s character and role so it has to sting a bit for Peter to be called by his old name again. It’s humbling. Peter, the one that professed by divine revelation that Jesus was the Messiah, acted out of character. He failed his Lord. When Jesus said everyone would fall away on the night of the arrest, Peter said, ‘They might but I never will!’ In the garden of Gethsemane, he fell asleep. He was prayerless. Basically, Peter’s eating humble pie for trying to live for Jesus in his own self-sufficiency, pride, and determination. He learned a valuable lesson. We fail when we don’t rely on Him.

Then Jesus asks Peter 3 times if Peter loves Him. A lot of people make a big deal out the use of the Greek words used here. Greek has 3 different words for love: *agape*, *phileo*, and *eros*. One is usually stated as divine or self-sacrificial love (*agape*), one a brotherly love (*phileo*), and more of an emotional love (*eros*). But while they are not synonyms, we often draw way to big of a distinction between them because they are used interchangeably at times. I think it’s helpful to think of the different types of love, but I’m cautious to make something out of it here. If something is to be said, I think it’s that Peter is saying his love has proven admirable but not self-sacrificial.

What I find interesting is the “charcoal fire.” In John 18:18, John said it was around a “charcoal fire” that Peter denied Jesus three times. The smell of the “charcoal fire” that day may very well take Peter’s mind back to that night in his darkest hour. Again, Jesus is doing something. Three times around a charcoal fire, he denied Jesus publicly. Now, three times around a charcoal fire, he affirms his love for Jesus publicly. He’s giving Peter a new charcoal fire memory. You have to think Peter looked at the charcoal fire differently the rest of his life. The smell brought back the memory. God did a great work in him sitting around a fire. You know, with us too, we have moments where God met us and we experienced God in powerful ways. I think we should note those moments and remember them. That’s part of what keeps us going is reminding ourselves of how God met us in the past. When we fail, we need to remember God started this work in me and He’ll finish it. He’ll see me through this.

And it’s worth considering that if you have failed God in the past, you should be on the lookout for God to give you another opportunity to right that wrong. Consider it a test, maybe. I failed Him here last time, but not this time. It’s also a good reminder not to define someone by one moment in their life and disregard all the good they’ve done. I see this a lot today. A coach or a pastor or whoever says something or does something that they disagree with or is out of character for them, and people write them off forever. They are then defined by that one statement or that one moment. As Christians we should be better than that. None of us want our story to be defined by one ill moment of weakness or fleshly reaction.

It also says that if you're living under the blanket of shame and guilt, thinking you're too far gone, and that God can never use you... you're wrong. 1) **Despite your failure, fellowship with Jesus is still available to you.** He loves you. He wants you to be restored. He wants to "make breakfast for you" and invite you to walk through it with Him. 2) **Despite your failure, there's a job to do—a mission to accomplish—to tell the world about Jesus.** Sure, there may be some moral failures that can keep you out of a church office or from holding a position, but there is no failure that should ever put you on the bench or take you out of the game completely. As His disciple, you have a mission to accomplish. Disciples to make. A world to change. And honesty, He'll even use your failures to advance His mission. They are part of our redemption story. By the way, this wouldn't be the last failure of Peter. In the book of Galatians, we see Paul confronting Peter about some hypocrisy concerning the Law and Gentiles. But again, that's not the end of his story either. Peter would eventually give his life for following Jesus. History tells us they crucified him upside down as Jesus foretells in crucifixion language:

*18 Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." 19 Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me!"*

After Jesus says this, Peter looks back at John and says, "What about that guy?" I love the fun rivalry between Peter and John. John wins the race to the tomb and rubs it in his face but he also loves Peter and is the only one to mention his restoration. What about John? Jesus basically says, "Don't worry about him. If I want to remain until I come again, what's it to you? You just follow Me." **You follow Me.** I can't think of a better phrase to end our Easter series with: "*Follow Me!*" That sums up what Easter means for us. We follow by yielding to the King. We follow by dying with the King: dying to sin and taking up our own cross. We follow by living for the King. Living to become like Him and help others do the same.

In application, I can imagine that some of us need to decide to follow Jesus for the first time this morning. You've been coming to church and listening to the messages and God keeps trying to get your attention and you know it. At some point you need to say, "Okay Jesus, I'm in. I'm going to follow You." Right now, right where you sit, let Him know that you're in. You're going to follow Him.

But I also understand there may be some of you here who have done that before but because of a failure in your walk with Jesus, you've put yourself on the bench like Peter. And you need to ignore all the voices that tell you, "You're a mess. A washout. God's done with you. He could never use you again." And let Jesus call you back into the game again. Look, we need the entire body of Christ involved in this mission. We need everyone using their spiritual gifts, talents, and resources to further the mission. The question is not, "Can God use you?" The question is, "Do you love Jesus?" If so, then follow Him. Obey Him. It doesn't matter what other disciples are doing. You follow Jesus as He leads you and where He leads you. So, the empty tomb means a new mission. We must rely on Jesus to fulfill the mission. But first, **we must decide to be part of the mission** to begin with. To follow Jesus.

In one of my favorite movies, *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (parents use caution; might use a VidAngel app), Walter is a photograph manager for Life magazine and traveled to other side of the world to find a mysterious, sometime unpredictable master photographer to finish his work. There's a decision made by Walter not to let the master photographer's work go unfinished. To enter into the adventure and take the path less traveled, not knowing what will come next. In pursuit of this photographer, following the photographer's steps, he finally finds him in the mountains in Afghanistan. And this free and untamed photographer does something that you wouldn't expect. He sees a band of locals playing soccer and says, "That looks like fun. I think I'll join." Then he turns to Walter and says, "We're going to be odd numbered if you don't join." That always stands out to me. It says to me, "We need everyone. Don't sit on the bench. Get in the game and have fun doing it. We're going to be odd numbered if you don't join."

If you have decided to follow Jesus, will you sing these 3 familiar verses with me in commitment or recommitment to Jesus?

Verse 1

I have decided to follow Jesus  
I have decided to follow Jesus  
I have decided to follow Jesus  
No turning back no turning back

Verse 2

The world behind me the cross before me  
The world behind me the cross before me  
The world behind me the cross before me  
No turning back no turning back

Verse 3

Though none go with me still I will follow  
Though none go with me still I will follow  
Though none go with me still I will follow  
No turning back no turning back

Eugene Thomas, Holland Davis

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