



## Sermon

Third Sunday of Easter, May 4, 2025

Psalm 30; John 20:1-19

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In the psalm we hear, “For his wrath endures but the twinkling of an eye; his favor, for a lifetime” (Psalm 30:5). Another rendering of this might be something like, “For God’s anger lasts but a moment, and God’s favor—or grace—for a lifetime.” The Hebrew is even more spare: “God’s anger or wrath enduring but a moment, as if in the twinkling of an eye, and grace, life.” How might we render grace and life? Grace lasts for a lifetime, yes, and through grace there is life.

In our Gospel scene today, at the Sea of Tiberias, on that shore on that dawn, Jesus, resurrected, asks Peter three questions—or the same question, three times—calling to mind for Peter and all hearers of this story that other day, not long before, when other people had asked Peter a question three times. Do you remember that day, when those gathered in Jerusalem recognized Peter and said to him, “Hey, don’t you know Jesus”?

And Peter said, “I do not know the man.”

Another person said, “You know Jesus. We’ve seen you with him, right?”

“No, not me, I don’t know him.”

And a third time, “Hey, you’re one of his disciples—you know him, right?”

And for the third time, Peter replied, “No, I do not know him.”

How desperately now Peter wishes to retrieve those moments and get a second chance to answer that question differently: to say, “Yes, I do know him. Yes, he is my teacher. Yes, he is my Lord.” The memory of his denial is seared into his broken heart. In his pain and grief, Peter is restless and cannot think of anything else to do to ease his soul but to go back to where he was and who he was before he even met Jesus in the first place; to go back before his life changed so irrevocably—that is, to the fishing boat, where Jesus had met him and called him in the first place, before everything changed.<sup>1</sup>

Peter tells the disciples, “I’m going fishing.” They know how heartbroken and restless he is, so they will not let him be alone and they assure him, “We’re going with you.” Peter desperately seeks that familiar place before his heart was so challenged and broken, seeks to be that person and to be in that place where Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> This and other insights are inspired by Debie Thomas’ essay on this Gospel passage, called “You Know Everything”, published on April 28, 2019 at <https://journeywithjesus.net/essays/2191-you-know-everything>.

was—as if he could be in any place where Jesus would not also be, as if he could bear any pain that Jesus would not also comfort, as if he could bear any shame that Jesus would not also heal.

This is the third resurrection appearance that we hear in the Gospel of John, and it is interesting to me that in his resurrected life—as his pre-resurrected life—“Jesus does not waste a moment,” as one author puts it, “on revenge or retribution.” He does not, for example, “storm Pilate’s house,” he does not “avenge himself on Rome,” he does not “punish those soldiers whose hands drove nails into his.”<sup>2</sup> He has so much reason for retribution and revenge, but he does not act upon it. He would have reasons to inflict revenge upon his friends, those who called themselves disciples and yet betrayed him when it mattered most. Instead, he goes to where Peter’s heart is broken, and he names and bears up and heals that which is “wounded and festering between” Peter’s heart and his own.<sup>3</sup> He wants new life for Peter—he sees it in him—and his grace will give Peter that new life.

The essayist Debie Thomas asks, “What would it be like if Christians were known as the people to run to in times of” pain, shame, “humiliation?” What would the world look like if Christians were known as the people to run to when your heart is broken the most, and be assured that there would be no retribution or blame, but healing and grace? “How might we, like Jesus, become sanctuary for the shamed?”<sup>4</sup>

Jesus desires new life for Peter. Jesus does not want Peter to be weighed down or broken by his pain or his shame, and so he meets Peter exactly where he is hurting the most, asking him these questions, giving him that second chance for which he is so hungry, asking him, “Do you love me?”

Peter is quick to say, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

Jesus says, “Then it’s time to do something about it.” “Do you love me?” he asks again.

“Yes, you know that I love you.”

“Then feed my sheep. Then tend my sheep.”

Jesus wants Peter to be released from his pain and his shame and go out and share the same grace he is receiving and the same love that is defining his life. Would that the shame and pain that we bear not keep us at sea, in the night, with nothing to gain, with nothing to eat, with no joy. As the psalm says, “Weeping may spend the night,” failure spends the night, despair is there for the night, and “joy comes in the morning.”

There is no place we could go where Jesus is not already; there is no pain we could bear that Jesus does not want to heal; there is no shame that could rend our hearts that Jesus does not and will not forgive. As Debie Thomas writes, “He knows how to build the fire and prepare the meal that will beckon us back to shore.”

On this shore, “Peter’s shame meets Jesus’ grace,” and that “grace wins,”<sup>5</sup> and that grace is life, for anger, pain, and shame endure for a moment, endure for the night, and God’s grace...grace is life.

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas, Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.