

John 21:15-19 (Third Sunday of Easter—Series C)
“Restored to Follow and Confess”
Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT
May 1, 2022

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our text from the Gospel Reading recorded in John 21:

¹⁵So when they had eaten, 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, “Feed my lambs.” ¹⁶He 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, “Tend my sheep.” ¹⁷He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved that 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, “Feed my sheep. ¹⁸Truly, truly I say to you, when you were young, you dressed yourself and walked where you wanted. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and will carry you where you do not want to go.” ¹⁹Now He said this showing by what kind of death he would glorify God. And He said to [Peter], “Follow Me.”

Does Jesus have reason to question your love for Him?

Around a charcoal fire, Peter, the Lord’s disciple, denied Jesus, denied his love for Jesus. From John 18, “So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in. The servant girl at the door said to Peter, ‘You also are not one of this man’s disciples, are you?’ He said, ‘I am not.’ Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself. . . . So they said to him, ‘You also are not one of his disciples, are you?’ He denied it and said, ‘I am not.’ One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, ‘Did I not see you in the garden with him?’ Peter again denied it, and at once a rooster crowed” (John 18:16–27 ESV).

Before a charcoal fire, Peter said that it was not true that he was a follower of Jesus. Peter said that he had no real love for Jesus. Peter said that he didn’t know the man, that the

person of Jesus was not his Lord and Master. And before a charcoal fire, the Crucified and Risen Jesus asked Peter three times, "Do you love Me?"

Three times—once for each denial—three times, "Do you love Me?" John records that the appearance of the Risen Christ on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, which is the Sea of Galilee, was the third time Jesus had appeared to the disciples after He rose from the dead (John 21:14). The third time Jesus appeared alive—as if to prove beyond doubt the reality of His resurrection. Peter is questioned three times—as if to obtain proof beyond doubt of the reality of Peter's love for Christ, once denied, and now confessed, "Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you."

In a private walk along the beach with Jesus, Peter confessed his guilt. What gave him the faith to do that? While Peter was denying Jesus, Jesus was suffering for Peter. Jesus went to the cross to pay for Peter's sins, including his denial. It was that forgiveness which was bestowed upon Peter and the others in the Upper Room when the Risen Lord appeared, saying, "Peace be with you." This is the peace of sins forgiven, sins removed by the shedding of Jesus' blood, peace forever sealed because Jesus is risen from the dead. On the shore of Galilee, Jesus restored Peter and recommissioned Peter as His disciple, His apostle, to feed and tend the sheep and lambs of Jesus the Good Shepherd. As once commentator put it, "Peter reaffirms his love for the Lord, and is rehabilitated and recommissioned. The commission is a pastoral one. Now to the evangelist's hook [as a 'fisher of men'] there is added the pastor's crook [to feed and tend the flock of Christ]. Peter went ahead to fulfill his double commission 'by hook and by crook.'" Peter the fisher of people with the Good News

and Peter the under-shepherd of the Good Shepherd, tending and feeding the flock of the Savior with the Word of Christ.

Does Jesus, then, have reason to question your love for Him as He did for Simon Peter? He does. We, like Peter, have also denied our Lord and Master and stand in need of Christ's forgiveness and restoration.

How do we as Christians sometimes deny our Lord? We might deny Christ—His person and saving work—by downplaying sin. Sin is every thought, word, desire, and action contrary to the Word of God as revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures. Sin isn't a regrettable lapse or an occasional stumble. We pretend that sin isn't a real problem when we say things like, "What I did is *no big deal!*" "It didn't *really* hurt *anybody.*" "It's just this once. Besides, *no one* will ever know." In truth, sin stages a rebellion against God's rule. Sin storms the heavens. Sin lays claim to God's throne. Sin defies God's authority. And sin leads to death!

Sin, then, is serious business because God says it is serious business. God doesn't overlook sin. God doesn't say, "Hey, no big deal." That's not how it works! God is holy, righteous, sovereign, and perfect. God can't overlook sin. God must punish sin. And God the Father punished OUR sin through the saving work of His One-of-a-Kind Son in His sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection. Each time you and I downplay our sin and think it isn't significant, we are saying to God, "The gift of your Son on the cross wasn't really necessary. I don't really need a Savior because sin isn't really a problem in my life." That is a denial of the person and work of Jesus.

The Address in the Rite of Confirmation highlights another way that we deny our Lord Jesus Christ. The pastor says to those to be Confirmed in their baptismal faith, "You have

been baptized and catechized in the Christian faith according to our Lord's bidding. Jesus said, 'Whoever confesses Me before men, I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.'" In our failure to confess Jesus Christ with our lips and with our actions, we deny that we belong to the Lord as His disciples. Paul writes in Romans 10:10, "For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." Confession of the person and work of Jesus is the evidence of faith in the heart. When a person has faith in Christ, he or she cannot help but speak of the Savior—about His death on the cross as the full payment for the sins of the world, about His resurrection from the dead that means eternal life and resurrection for all who believe.

To deny Jesus—by downplaying sin and the need for a Savior, by not speaking the truth about who Jesus is and what He has done in love for the life of the world—betrays a lack of faith or a fear of people and not fear of God. And this eats away faith. Unless checked by repentance and renewed faith, this fear of what others may do and say can ultimately destroy saving faith. Jesus warns us, "Whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 10:33 ESV).

But Peter denied Christ! Yes, and in His love and mercy, Jesus forgave and restored and renewed Peter for the work of serving in His Kingdom. And the good news is that our Lord Jesus does the very same for us sinner-saints who also deny the Lord in our lives.

For us and for our salvation from sin and the punishment of death, Jesus was given over to the death of the cross. He shed His blood to pay for our sins of fearing people rather than showing fear, love, and trust in God alone. Christ died for every time we downplay sin

and do not recognize our need for a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. The Lord Jesus also died for every denial of Him in our lives as we do not always give the good confession of Jesus, the Son of God, our Lord, in the presence of others. Because Jesus died for you and rose for you, you can be absolutely sure of His never-ending grace, love, and mercy for you in the forgiveness of sins and in the restoration to be His disciple each and every time you fail.

Jesus always restores us once again after we fail Him time and time and time again. The Absolution we hear every Sunday morning really works again and again and again. "As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The Supper we receive reinstates us over and over again. "Take, eat; this is My Body. Take, drink; this is My Blood. Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sins." Jesus welcomes us again today through His Word and by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit to follow Him and tend His sheep as we confess Him as Savior and Lord with our words and deeds, giving the Gospel News of Jesus to others throughout the week.

Our Risen Lord Christ calls broken disciples to come to Him again and again and be filled with His Word and Sacrament so that they might go out into the world to bring His Word to others. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we confess our sins. We have lived as if God did not matter and as if we mattered most. We have not let His love have its way with us, and so our love for others has failed. We have denied Christ. And the Lord Jesus has had mercy and forgives on us. He restores and sends us back out into the world to serve Him and our neighbors in love according to our vocations and callings in this life. In the confidence of our Baptismal faith, we can say with the hymnwriter:

Today Your mercy calls us
To wash away our sin.
However great our trespass,
Whatever we have been,
However long from mercy
Our hearts have turned away,
Your precious blood can wash us
And make us clean today.

Today our Father calls us;
His Holy Spirit waits;
His blessed angels gather
Around the heav'nly gates.
No question will be asked us
How often we have come;
Although we oft have wandered,
It is our Father's home.

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Amen!