



LESSONS FROM LAKESIDE
John 21:1-14

In the movie, **THE MISSION**, a slave trader by the name of Rodrigo Mendoza kills his own brother. Guilt begins to paralyze him. He believes he is beyond redemption. He seeks out a Jesuit priest. He confesses his sin and evil actions. He believes there is no way he can ever be forgiven. The priest disagrees – and encourages him to seek redemption. The priest takes him on a journey to mountains located in Paraguay. The priest has founded a mission among the very people he has sold into slavery. Rodrigo is carrying, at the priest's instructions, a very heavy bundle strapped to his body with thick ropes. In a high noon encounter – Rodrigo is approached by one of the Indians of the tribe with a sharp knife. Instead of slitting his throat – he cuts the rope holding the heavy load on his back and shoulders. The load quickly crashes into a ravine on the side of the mountain. The place of evil and shame for Rodrigo – has now become his place of redemption and salvation.¹ He was no longer paralyzed by guilt and shame. A new life awaited him.

Yes, the cross – the emblem of suffering and shame – the place where the world demonstrated its hatred of God – has now become the place where God demonstrated how deep his love of the world is. Calvary is the place of death and evil – but it is also the place of our redemption as well.

As we open our scripture lesson today from St. John's gospel, we encounter Peter and six other disciples at a time when everything in their way of life was threatened. They ached in body and soul. They were uncertain. They could not handle the disappointment and despair of Black Friday. The only memories they had – were bad memories. These memories haunted them everywhere they went.

These disciples might have heard about the resurrection – but they did not know the implications of the resurrection. The resurrection had not yet translated into life and mission in the world.²

Since the disciples could not see any real reason for living in the future – they tried to find a meaningful way to deal with their past. They were living – but as we share on Easter Sunday – on the wrong side of the Easter message. They retreated to the past – but God wanted and had opened a new horizon for them. They were resistant to this concept – as we are today.

In the fall of 1971 – four of my classmates and fraternity brothers and I drove by car from New Jersey to Huron College, Huron, South Dakota. It was a 1500 mile trip – and took 21 hours usually. We only stopped for gas, potty breaks, coffee, and Twinkies. Somewhere in Eastern Iowa we stopped for gas, changed drivers, and off we went. Most of us were asleep by the time we left the service plaza at 3 a.m. My friend and owner of the car – Larry – woke up and said, **“Why are we getting closer to Chicago?”** Imagine the horror and waste of time and effort when you realize you are going in the wrong direction. This was exactly the condition the disciples were in.

For the disciples in **verses 3 and 4** it shares it was night and they caught nothing. It is John’s way of saying that the Jesus way – truth – and life has not yet been grasped by the mind – and therefore could not direct the feet in the right way and direction. They were not Spirit-filled disciples yet.

Today I would like to share three lessons from lakeside to help us live on the right side of the Easter message.

FIRST CHRIST MUST HEAL OUR PAST AND PAINFUL MEMORIES.

Dr. David Seamends of Asbury Seminary wrote a marvelous book entitled, **HEALING OF MEMORIES.** He shares that our hurtful memories and damaged emotions need to be healed – as much as our physical bodies. Our physical bodies might never heal properly without this necessary healing. He encourages us to invite Christ into our past – as into a house that has been locked up – and the blind drawn. We need to bring God’s love and light into these dark places. We must open the windows of our life to fresh air and sunlight.

Louise Fletcher Tarkington expressed the heartfelt wish of many when she wrote,

**“I wish there were some wonderful place
Called the Land of Beginning Again,
Where all of our mistakes and all of our heartaches
And all of our selfish sins,
Could be dropped like a shabby old coat at the door
And never be put on again.”**

That is why we sing songs like:

**“What can wash away my sin – nothing but the blood of Jesus.
What can make me whole again – nothing but the blood of Jesus.”**

The disciples for very understandable reasons were trying to reclaim a measure of meaning and identity by redeeming their painful past. Being fishermen they returned to the familiar. They had resigned from their calling – but Christ would not accept their resignation. His work was just beginning in them. U-turns are possible. Christ has the power and authority to minister to all dimensions of our lives past – present – future.

When Christ engages Peter and the disciples at lakeside – he does so to redeem their past. The very same place he first called them into ministry – would be the place he re-claimed them as well. God in Christ was more interested in their future – than in their past. However – he first heals the past – to open the present and future for them.

SECONDLY, THE LESSON FROM LAKESIDE TEACHES US THAT WE NEED TO REDEEM OUR FAILURES AS WELL.

The disciples sat in the boats – empty hearts – empty nets – just empty. Nothing like failure to douse your hopes and dreams.

Failure is probably the one common experience among us. The word of God from Genesis to Revelation never denies the reality of failure. The Bible is only 70 or so verses along in its story – when failure comes to Adam and Eve.

A colleague shares, the culture in which we live hates the notion of failure. It uses all kinds of academic words to keep from saying the ‘F’ word. This culture has also invaded the church. It is off limits to admit our failures.³

The question is not if we will fail – but our response when we do fail. Let us look at the roll call of failures: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Elijah, David, Peter, James and John. Their failures actually drew them closer to God and vital faith. Failure was the doorway to a new spiritual direction. John Wesley’s first and only trip to America was a total failure. He wrote in his journal “I went to America to convert the Indian – but who will convert me?” It was the soil for his Aldersgate experience and the rest is history.

Yes, they had fished all night and caught nothing. As Max Lucado shares, **“Though the light reflected on the lake – the darkness lingered in Peter’s heart.”** As Peter’s eyes spotted the charcoal fire – he remembered the charcoal fires of a few nights ago where he denied his Master big time. Courage turned to cowardice in a New York minute. Perhaps he heard the rooster crowing. It cut to the heart – the guilt was suffocating. Perhaps you have a painful memory lodged deep in your soul and spirit: a bitter divorce – a betrayal that hit like a ton of bricks. The late Bible teacher, Dr. Ray C. Stedman, reminds us “Though failure is a painful experience – there is nothing like failure to get a person’s undivided attention – and to render that person teachable.”⁴

So, Jesus comes to Peter not to hammer him into further humiliation – but to mold him into a greater servant for the kingdom of God. Peter and the others learned **“His grace is sufficient for all.”** Instead of a roadblock – it was the doorway to vital faith. This is a lesson from lakeside that never fades or fails.

THIRDLY, WE ARE COMMISSIONED TO SHARE MINISTRY WITH THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN AND FAILED.

Since the Bible makes it quite clear that all have sinned and fallen – the whole world is our parish. The harvest is plentiful.

Our mission is to get others to the right side of the road. Barbara Johnson tells of a childhood experience in which she broke a vase that was a cherished heirloom. Because she knew its value – she cried out when she broke it. Her mother came running at the sound of broken glass. She was surprised that her mother hugged her – rather than hollering at her. Barbara said she learned that day “she was the real family treasure.”

Yes, as Max Lucado shares “We do have that type of a father. A God who is at his best – when we are at our worst. A heavenly father whose grace is strongest when our devotion is weakest.”⁵ So we have the great privilege to tell people the good news – that because of the cross and resurrection:

**“Our lives are not futile
Our failures are not fatal
Our deaths are not final.”⁶**

So the story begins with Peter and others felling threatened to the core of their existence – running from their spiritual failure and retreating to the past. They are encountered by the living – resurrected Lord – and are given a future and a new direction to travel in – and history records just how well they did travel. Like Rodrigo, a new life awaits us as well.

Jesus re-called Peter and the disciples and us to follow him. He reinstated them to ministry and mission. I close with these words of the hymn writer:

**“Jesus calls us by Thy mercies
Savior, may we hear Thy call
Give our hearts to Thine obedience
Serve and love Thee best of all.”⁷**

Peter did and it made all the difference in his life and others. The Resurrection was now translated into ministry and mission.

May God give us grace and courage so to do.

Amen and amen.

Reverend Eric S. Ritz
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ENDNOTES

¹ John Hanneman, **PBCC**, October 19, 2008, catalog No. 1396, page 1, www.pbcc.org, accessed, 4/12/10.

² Fred B. Craddock, [et.al], **“Preaching Through the Christian Year, YEAR C,”** Trinity Press International, Valley Forge, PA, First Edition, 1994, page 242.

³ Thanks to Jim Detmer for this insight.

⁴ Ray C. Stedman, **GOD’S LOVING WORD**, Discovery House Publishers, 1993, page 475.

⁵ Max Lucado, **SIX HOURS ONE FRIDAY**, Multnomah Press, 1989, page 85.

⁶ Ibid, page 174.

⁷ Hymn **“Jesus Calls Us,”** fourth stanza.