



**HALF-TIME IS NOW OVER**  
**John 21:1-14**

The story of “Wrong Way Riegels” provides an illuminating backdrop for our scripture lesson today. On New Year’s Day, 1929, Georgia Tech played UCLA in the Rose Bowl. In that game a young man named Roy Riegels recovered a fumble for UCLA. Picking up the loose ball, he lost his direction and ran sixty-five yards toward the wrong goal line. A potentially positive play had now demoralized the entire UCLA team.

At halftime the UCLA players filed off the field and into the dressing room. As others sat down on the benches and the floor, Riegels put a blanket around his shoulders, sat down in a corner, and put his face in his hands.

A football coach usually has a great deal to say to his team during halftime. That day Coach Price was quiet. No doubt he was trying to decide what to do with Riegels.

When the timekeeper came in and announced that there were three minutes before playing time, Coach Price looked at the team and said, **“Men, the same team that played the first half will start the second.”** The players got up and started out, all but Riegels. He didn’t budge. The coach looked back and called to him. Riegels didn’t move. Coach Price went over to where Riegels sat and said, “Roy, didn’t you hear me? The same team that played the first half will start the second.”

Roy Riegels looked up, his cheeks wet with tears. “Coach,” he said, “I can’t do it. I’ve ruined you. I’ve ruined the university’s reputation. I’ve ruined myself. I can’t face that crowd out there.”

Coach Price reached out, put his hands on Riegels’ shoulder, and said, “Roy, get up and go on back. **The game is only half over.**”<sup>1</sup>

The disciples had traveled and trained for 3 years with their coach and mentor – Jesus. It had been an adventure of a lifetime. However, their lives and journeys were now headed in the wrong direction.

As the sun rises at lakeside we find Peter and 7 of his teammates clearly disillusioned and full of broken dreams. If the bright sun was sparkling over the water of the lake – it was still very dark in their souls and spirits. The memories of the past days haunted them everywhere they went. You know that feeling. Perhaps it was a painful

divorce, the loss of a job, the death of a spouse, the betrayal of a friend, or a dream that has faded away.

There was the mockery of the trial of Jesus before Pilate. Then the humiliating walk with a cross to the place of the skull. Then Peter's denial of his teacher and Lord 3 times. They had fled the scene. All their best laid plans and dreams had vanished. All seemed hopeless. Their great hopes and expectations for a political and social revolution had faded away.

Perhaps you can identify with the pain of Peter and his teammates. Where can we go to unburden ourselves of destructive memories that prevent us from going forward? Our lesson simply shares that in **verses 4 & 5** a stranger joins them at shoreline and calls them 'friends.'

As John tells the story – he uses a narrative tool known as 'literary irony.' The reader is aware of facts that are hidden from the characters. Although they did not at first recognize him – they are agreeable to his suggestion to cast their nets on the right side of the boat. It had been a futile night of work - empty nets and empty lives.

Suddenly the nets were filled and heavy with fish again and only then did they recognize it was their Lord – alive and well. Jesus gets their attention by evoking an old memory.<sup>2</sup>

It was at this very spot 3 long years ago that Jesus had called Peter and others into ministry. It is no surprise that Peter and the others run to the shore. They run to the only One who can heal their painful memories and chart a new course for them.<sup>3</sup>

The disciples, like Roy Riegels, were traveling in the wrong direction. They also had 'fumbled' and were running away from Jerusalem to the Sea of Galilee. They thought the game of life was over. Imagine their surprise when Jesus tells them that the same team of disciples who had failed and fumbled to this point were going to be the **instruments** that God had chosen to usher in the kingdom that Christ's death on the cross had guaranteed. At lakeside, Jesus took the time to take trouble hearts and transform them into trusting once again. He still does.

In **verse 9** we see that our Lord had prepared a charcoal fire to cook the fish and bake the bread. This is a detail that must not be overlooked. Once again this evokes another painful memory for Peter that must be reviewed and healed. About 10 days before - Peter had stood before another charcoal fire in **John 18:18** – and denied he knew the Lord and that he was one of his disciples. The Lord knew this painful memory cried out for healing – a new direction – a fresh start.

He called himself Gary Tredway, and he lived in the affluent town of Scottsdale, Arizona. He had married and had a child. He'd insisted that they give the child his mother's last name, not his. In time he decided to run for city council. A newspaper reporter came out to do a profile on the candidate and found him very reluctant to talk about his family and his past. He said he was an orphan, and he didn't want to talk

about it. The reporter kept pushing for stories about his life, and he broke down. “I’m not Gary Tredway,” he finally said. Turns out that his real name was Howard Mechanic. He’d been convicted in 1970 for antiwar activity, and had been “on the lam” for 30 years. He was hiding out, hoping the government would forget, thinking he was safe. He recently completed his 5 years in federal prison. His life cried out for healing – a new beginning – a fresh start. We all do.

A colleague tells the story of a manager who was assigned to work on the island of Guam. Every week, he would call the home office of the company that he worked for in Maryland. There is a significant time difference between the Island of Guam and the state of Maryland. It could be 4:00 p.m. on Thursday in Maryland, but it would be 7:00 a.m. Friday morning in Guam. One day when a series of events happened that made the day one of great aggravation and exasperation for someone in the Maryland office – they received his phone call from Guam. The person on the other end said, **“I am sure glad you called today. It lets me know there will be a tomorrow.”**<sup>4</sup>

When our Lord engages Peter and the disciples at lakeside – he comes to reassure them there will be a tomorrow. He will not allow them to be held captive by their painful past. He would not allow them to nourish their guilt and failure. He comes to redeem them. He covers their past failures and painful memories with the power of his forgiveness and grace.

When the disciples recognized it was the Lord Jesus who shared breakfast with them even though they had failed and forsaken him, they never felt more loved. Their empty hearts were now filled with His love. Jesus declares to them that the game of life is only half over. They are to turn around and get back to work. A new assignment would be waiting for them. The schedule would go on. Jesus gives them another chance to change the world.

Life and work that was futile apart from Christ – now becomes successful once again in his power and presence. The risen Christ was among them in their daily work.

As I shared on Easter Sunday notice that Jesus did not bully people into worship or discipleship. Participation in the resurrection cannot be forced or manipulated.<sup>5</sup> For most of these disciples this is the second experience of the resurrected for them. They have not connected the power and purpose of the resurrection to the ministry and mission that Christ had shared with them in the 3 years he was physically with them.<sup>6</sup>

Jesus once again was teaching the disciples that the resurrection had more significance than gaining a place in heaven for the afterlife. It was a power and purpose to live life now on earth. If Jesus’ resurrection took place here on earth – you can bet the house it has to do with our life here on earth as well.<sup>7</sup> The resurrection, which we celebrate here every Sunday, transformed everything from Monday morning to Saturday night. The risen Christ came to transform the disciples so the world will not transform and trap them in its destructive power. The disciples once again had to accept the invitation of Jesus as they did 3 years earlier to follow him in his way and truth.

As you and I travel the road of life – we should keep this question before us – **‘Are we impacting the world – or is the world infecting us?’**

Every time Jesus appeared after Easter he initially went unrecognized by those who loved Him most. They were bemoaning that the world was going to hell – all seemed lost. Then Jesus appeared and at first was unrecognized. They were searching for something tremendous, but He appeared in an ordinary way. It is his love that transforms the ordinary into the extra-ordinary. No matter how ordinary life is, it becomes **extra** when the Risen Christ is revealed to us.

Dr. Tony Campolo, in his film series, **“You Can Make a Difference.”** told the story of his Christian colleague with a PhD in English literature who quit his job and became a mailman. Tony goes to his apartment to change his mind. Let me share this testimony of how an ordinary mailman is doing extra-ordinary things for God.

Tony said, “I couldn’t change his mind, so I came back with the old Protestant work ethic thing. I said, ‘Charlie, if you’re gonna be a mailman, be the best mailman you can be.’

**He looked at me with a silly grin and said, ‘I’m a lousy mailman.’**

I asked, ‘What do you mean, you’re a lousy mailman?’

He answered, ‘Everybody else gets the mail delivered by one o’clock; I never get back until about five thirty or six.’

**‘What takes so long?’ I wanted to know.**

He said, ‘I visit! That’s why it takes so long. You wouldn’t believe how many people on my route never got visited until I became the mailman. But I’ve got this problem I can’t sleep at night.’

**I asked, ‘Why can’t you sleep?’**

He said, ‘Who can sleep after drinking twenty cups of coffee?’

I began to get the image of this mailman on the job. He was no ordinary mailman. I could picture him going from door to door and at each home giving more than the mail. I could see him visiting solitary widows, counseling troubled teenagers, joking with lonely old men. I could see him delivering the mail in a way that was extra-ordinary for the people on his route. He’s the only mailman I know that on his birthday the people on his route get together, hire out a gym, and throw a party for him.

They love him because he’s a mailman who expresses the love of Jesus everywhere he goes. In his own subtle way, my friend Charles is changing his world,

changing the lives of people touching them where they are, making a difference in their lives. It may not sound like much, but that man who is delivering mail, like Jesus would deliver mail, is an agent of God who is changing the world.”<sup>8</sup> That is the same spirit that must live inside of us as we go about our work and witness in every day life as well.

In a few moments, you will receive the elements of the Lord’s Supper to nurture you in the Jesus’ Way and Truth that leads to life eternal. There is something about this sacrament that puts all of life into a new perspective.

Today, confess – come clean with Christ – where you feel more burdened, burned out, most frightened – most disappointed – most depressed. Share it with Christ!

Then allow these elements to declare to you that it is only halftime in our journey in life. God has a new word, a new direction, a new assignment for your life.

Let Christ’s power into your life – so you can go forward knowing there will be a tomorrow. Halftime is now over!

Because of this meal – every meal took on new meaning and purpose for them.

Look around! The same team that started the first half – will start the second half. Let us go to the Holy Table!

Reverend Eric S. Ritz  
May 4, 2008  
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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> **“Leadership Magazine,”** spring, 1992 edition, **“To illustrate”** column, page 49.

<sup>2</sup> Gary M. Burge, **“JOHN: The NIV Application Commentary,”** Zondervan Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 2000, page 596.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 590.

<sup>4</sup> This story is attributed to **Barbara Brokhoff.**

<sup>5</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, **LIVING THE RESURRECTION,** NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO, 2006, page 75.

<sup>6</sup> Fred B. Craddock, [et. al.], **“Preaching Through the Christian Year, YEAR C,”** Trinity Press International, Valley Forge, PA, first edition, 1994, page 242.

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<sup>7</sup> Peterson, op.cit, page 67.

<sup>8</sup> Tony Campolo, **YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE**, Word, Inc., 1984, pages 54-55.