

forgiveness of our failures gives us the opportunity to become what God has called us to be.

Failure can sometimes keep us from seeing Jesus and yet, in the midst of our failure is where we find the true heart of the gospel. That in our failure, our sinfulness, our moments when we have disappointed not only God but also ourselves, Jesus says, "do you love me?" We respond yes, Lord we love you. Then all of a sudden that moment of forgiveness, our lives which we were sure were disqualified, become something beautiful again for the Kingdom of God. Failure is not the place where we miss Jesus, but the place where Jesus comes and meets us.

Composer and singer Matt Redmond, who gave us great worship songs like Heart of Worship and 10,000 Reasons, also wrote a song entitled Father's Song. Redmond's own father had taken his life when Matt was just a young boy. His mother had never told him about his father until he was older. He of course had to relive this pain again. However in an interview about this pain in his life he made this comment:

It was like losing his father all over again, but by then he was hearing another Father's song. He was hearing his heavenly Father singing a song of love over his life. It was out of this profound sense of being loved that he wrote "The Father's Song." After recording it on March 1, it suddenly struck him that this was his deceased father's birthday, that he would have been sixty years old on this very day. Matt realized what an amazing thing it was that he had never felt fatherless. He said he could listen to a lot of songs, a lot of messages coming at him, but the one he knew would impact his life more than any other was the "Father's Song."

I have heard so many songs
Listened to a thousand tongues
But there is one
That sounds above them all

The Father's song
The Father's love
You sung it over me and for eternity
It's written on my heart

[CHORUS:]
Heaven's perfect melody
The Creator's symphony
You are singing over me
The Father's song
Heaven's perfect mystery
The king of love has sent for me
And now you're singing over me
The Father's song

The Father is singing his song of love over every one of his children but not all of us are hearing it. For some of us, our heavenly Father is a blank, a face we can't seem to see. We live like orphans, harassed and worn out by the requirements of life, because we have no sense of our Father's love.

Are you missing Jesus? Maybe it is the busyness and routine of life. It might be the guilt and shame of failure. Peter has been there and that is exactly where Jesus meets him again along the shore where He first called him and says again... "Follow me."

It seems to me that this is how everyday begin. We begin with our routines, we begin knowing we will fail in some way and yet Jesus calls us every morning... "Come follow me and we begin again."



WE HAVE SEEN JESUS

Missing Jesus

John 21:1-14



These past weeks commemorated the 150th anniversary of the assassination of President Lincoln. Lincoln was the first American President to be assassinated and of course it happened on the heels of the end of the Civil War. When it came time to transport Lincoln's body back to Illinois, they placed his casket on a special built rail car that had actually been built to be the President's special car for travel. However, Lincoln never got to travel in it except in death. The plan was to take Lincoln's body through many large metropolitan areas and let him lie in state in those cities for people to pay their respects. The idea was to truly have a national funeral.

The authorities were not sure what they would experience when they began the journey. There was an estimated 300,000 Confederate Soldiers who were still unaware that the war was over. There were many who were still fighting, even though the official surrender had taken place. In addition, Washington D.C. was south of the Mason Dixon line. They began the journey with great mystery and questions. They were not sure what the response in the cities might be like, but they began the journey to take the body of Lincoln home.

One of their first stops was Baltimore, Maryland. When they pulled into town, there were so many people that it took hours for them to get to the center of town to unload the casket and get Lincoln's body to the place where he would lie in state. People by the thousands came and because it took them so long to get to town, Lincoln only lied in state for two hours before they placed his body back in the rail car and continued the journey.

However, it was reported those hours into the night that people still came to the place during the day where the casket had been.

In fact, it was reported that for over a month people came. They brought their children with them. They came and stood in that place where the casket had been. They came just to stare at the place where the President had once laid. They prayed and they reflected on the significance of Lincoln's life and now his death. They went to the closest place where he once had been.

As I heard this story this week, I thought about our text today. I thought about Peter and the other six and why they made their journey to Galilee and go fishing. John's gospel is the one that gives us the Galilee encounters with the risen Jesus. The other gospels, with the exception of one mention in Matthew, have all of the encounters with Jesus in Jerusalem. Yet, John gives us these stories of Galilee. These stories do fulfill the promise of the angels at the empty tomb. The angel said, "tell my disciples and Peter that I am going ahead of them to Galilee and there they will see me." Since that moment, Jesus had appeared to the two on the road to Emmaus and then twice now, in the upper room a week apart. The time that is between the second upper room encounter and this one is not certain. All we get is that it is afterward. It is another moment. It is a story and another encounter. John would conclude this was the third time Jesus appeared to His disciples after being raised from the dead.

Why did Peter decide to go fishing? Some have said it is an indication of Peter returning to an old way of life. When faced with uncertainty, what we normally do is return to that which we know best. We go back to what is certain. Peter may have gone back to fishing that day because it is what he knows best.

George Beasley Murray suggests that this is not the case. There is no sense of apostasy here, in Dr. Beasley Murray's opinion. He

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simply writes, it is much more simple. The disciples have to eat! It is suggested that this is simply the routine of gathering food.

I wonder if there might be a third possibility. I wonder if Peter returns to the place he remembers meeting Jesus the first time. I wonder if he returns to the place where Jesus once had been and there he feels close to Jesus again. Just like those who came and stood where President Lincoln had been and they felt connected to this great man, Peter returns to the place where he first met Jesus and there he is connected to Jesus again.

The Celts called these places thin places. Those place where we sense something deeper and more meaningful in our lives. In Ireland there are of course actual thin places and the Bible is full of those places where God breaks through in a special way. We all can think of places and moments when we feel God has spoken to us. There are places we go because there we experienced God before.

Peter goes to a place where Jesus once had been and goes fishing. After a night of fishing that has been fruitless and pointless, Jesus comes walking on the shore and yet the disciples did not recognize it was Jesus. Jesus calls to them, “friends haven’t you any fish?” It is one of those questions where you already know the answer. “No”, they answered. Jesus instructed, “Throw your net out on the right side.” When they did, they not only found some fish... but so many they could hardly bring in the catch.

The story here in John, reads much like to the call of Peter in Luke 5. There Peter tells Jesus that they have fished all night long and caught nothing but because Jesus tells them to try again, when they do and the nets are so full that they about sink the boat. It is in that moment that Peter lays down his nets and follows Jesus.

Now after all of the moments Peter had experienced, after traveling with Jesus, listening to Jesus, watching Jesus, then the dark moments of the denial and the cross and then the hope of seeing him after the resurrection, Peter is back where he began.

What goes around comes around. It does sometimes seem like there are seasons in life that come and go, and sometimes we feel we are right back where we started. Peter had followed Jesus for three years. Had it really made a difference?

Then the moment of realization. The stranger on

the shore was Jesus. Peter can’t wait to row the boat and he swims to shore and the others row the boat back to shore. There they encounter Jesus. We are told that breakfast is already being cooked and they should add their catch to the fish on the fire. There Jesus broke the bread and gave them the fish and the bread and John writes, “no one dare ask Him “who are you?” they knew it was the Lord.”

This story has much in common with some of the other stories of the resurrection. There is lack of recognition and then, there is recognition. There is something about Jesus sharing the bread and the fish both reminders of other times Jesus had broke bread and provided fish. There is something about the moment that they knew it was Jesus.

Do you ever find yourself like Peter and the others? This story is a story of the between moments. It is the story of the moments they had seen Jesus and the moment when they would fully understand their mission. It is that moment between the moments we see Jesus. It is the moment of missing Jesus.

In what moments do we miss Jesus? In what moments of life do we miss that Jesus is right with us and yet, we do not recognize His presence? Here in our text there are two experiences that I believe can cause us to miss Jesus’ presence.

The first one is the routine of the day. Peter and the others do return to the routine they had known before Jesus. They are back on the sea fishing. They are back where it is familiar. They are back where they were before they met Jesus. They are back to the routine.

The routine of the day is one of the places where it can sometimes seem that Jesus is missing. Every morning begins with a new list of expectations and busyness. Whether it is the routine of our work, our home, our children’s schedules or even the emptiness of loneliness of the day, the routine becomes just that... the routine and the routine can seem empty of the presence of Jesus.

In a New York Time column entitled “The Busy Trap”, Tim Kreider describes the trap of busyness in our lives. He begins the article with this statement:

If you live in America in the 21st century you’ve probably had to listen to a lot of people tell you how busy they are. It’s become the default response when you ask anyone how they’re doing: “Busy!” “So busy.” “Crazy busy.” It is, pretty

obviously, a boast disguised as a complaint. And the stock response is a kind of congratulation: “That’s a good problem to have,” or “Better than the opposite.”

They’re busy because of their own ambition or drive or anxiety, because they’re addicted to busyness and dread what they might have face in its absence. Busyness serves as a kind of existential reassurance, a hedge against emptiness; obviously your life cannot possibly be silly or trivial or meaningless if you are so busy, completely booked, in demand every hour of the day.

Busyness he suggests is a hedge against emptiness. Is that the case for us? Is our busyness, the routine of the day actually a defense against the emptiness our lives might posses without the busyness?

There is something about the routine that causes us to miss the presence of Jesus. However, it does not have to be this way. In fact, what we find is that Jesus as our example was fully present in the routine of the day. Jesus actually was a man of habit and routine. It was his habit to go off and pray. It was his habit to go to the Synagogue and worship with God’s people. Jesus also seems to be one who is on a schedule. He moves from town to town with a mission of preaching, teaching and healing in various places. He has a schedule of going to Jerusalem, then to Samaria and Caesarea Philippi. He is a man of habit and a man of schedule. He even tries to go away and get rest. He is a man of routine.

He is a man whose lives are filled with interruptions. Those interrupt Jesus in need. On His way to somewhere else, Jesus encounters people who are hurting, people who have questions and even those who are His critics. In each moment, Jesus saw the opportunity to display the very presence and power of God.

It very well could be that it is not that Jesus is missing in the routine, but we are missing Jesus in the routine. It has been said that in the gospels whenever there are fishermen and fishing stories, there is nothing to show until Jesus shows up. In other words, it is Jesus who actually gives our routine meaning and purpose.

FAILURE CAN SOMETIMES KEEP US FROM SEEING JESUS AND YET, IN THE MIDST OF OUR FAILURE IS WHERE WE FIND THE TRUE HEART OF THE GOSPEL.

Our work has purpose when we present it as a gift to God. When we work unto the Lord and not unto others, then our work becomes sacred work no matter what our work might be. We do our best as Christians at work because we are not simply working to get paid, we are not working to get accolades, we are not working for self ambition but we are working to please God.

Our family life has purpose when Jesus is the center of our family life. When we realize that our marriages should glorify God and the most important thing we teach our children is not geometry, chemistry, history, or how to throw a curve ball but that Jesus is Lord, then the routine of family life becomes sacred as well.

Our interruptions become not moments of frustration, but moments of opportunity to see just what does God have planned for me today that I did not see coming. The routine is not the place that is missing Jesus, but actually the place where Jesus is

present.

Another experience that can cause us to miss Jesus is failure. In our story there are two stories of failure. There is the failure of not catching fish and there is a larger story of failure that is hanging over Peter like a cloud. Peter’s denial of Jesus informs this story in Galilee. It is interesting that Peter is found in the same place Jesus found him first. Did Peter think his denial of Jesus had precluded him of following Jesus? When Peter arrives on the shore there is a charcoal fire. The only other time this word is mentioned is the fire around where Peter warmed himself and uttered his words of denial. As we continue in the chapter we find Jesus asking Peter if he loved Him. Peter said of course I love you and you know I love you. Three times, the same as the denials, Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him. In each case when Peter says you know I love you, Jesus gives him a purpose, “feed my sheep.”

Why does Jesus choose three questions? What is the purpose of this moment? It is to say that whatever your failure Jesus forgives? Jesus does not just forgive once, but all of your failures. Forgiveness is not simply a moment of okay forget it. It is not a trivial thing. It is the moment when not only we are released from what we have done, but also we are restored for what God has for us to do. God’s