Continuing in our series on the question Jesus asked, today we catch up with the disciples on the Sea of Tiberius. Jesus has been crucified, buried, and resurrected. Jesus manifests Himself to the disciples. Before we go any further, I just want to say how important and encouraging this chapter is. This is a chapter for the church as a whole and for us as individuals. It addresses our great need for reconciliation—to receive forgiveness and guidance from Jesus. I think of how Peter must be feeling. Perhaps he now has his failures while he was with Jesus come to mind: the sinking while walking on water, the bold, failed declaration of “not me Lord. I will always follow you”; his pulling Jesus aside to rebuke Him; the angry wielding of the sword in the garden; the rooster’s crows confirming his predicted denials; and now the heartbreak of Jesus’ death. Now, as recorded in the Gospel of John, the risen Jesus has made a fire and is preparing breakfast when the disciples arrive on shore. And we see the beautiful heart of the Good Shepherd motivating Peter in love. Peter, in his anguish and desperation, defaults to what he used to do and who he used to be. In John 21:3 Peter has simply said, “I am going fishing.” This behavior begs each of us to answer the question, “What influences my identity?” To whom or to what does each of us turn when we have failed or when things are not going our way? Listen, Church, with Jesus, failure is never final!

Notice how Jesus addresses Peter in verse 15: “Simon.” Jesus calls Peter by his old name. Of interest here, the name “Simon” means “to hear, one who hears and obeys.” Simon is the English rendering of the Hebrew name *Shimon*, which comes from the Hebrew word *SHEMA*, which means to hear, to listen, to understand, and to respond. Peter had denied Jesus three times around a fire and now is being restored around a fire. The primary mark of the redeemed has always been love for God. ***The*** Shema, the confession of faith in the O.T. declares, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts” (Deuteronomy 6:4-6). Family, listen! We cannot love Jesus more than “these” if we put “these” above Jesus. In response to Jesus’ appearance, Peter has to take a deep look into himself, inspecting his identity. Peter learns that although he has forsaken Christ, Christ has not forsaken him--even in his imperfection and failure. Jesus is graciously, publically restoring Peter to care for His flock. Jesus did not give up on Peter and He does not give up on us. But for there to be full restoration, there must be full repentance. Now, we could get into the uses of the word “love” here. Jesus uses the form of the Greek word “agape” (“love feast”)\* for the first two questions and a form of “phileo”\*\* for the third question. Peter answers with “Phileo” all three times. But I want to focus on two things: Just as Peter’s three denials of Christ were public, Christ asks Peter this question publicly and three times: “Do you love me more than these?” It is a restoration and a reinstatement. It is a call unto Peter to get out of the boat (redirect his attention) and get back to Jesus. Jesus says to “abide in my love”—while we, as Peter does, often abide elsewhere. We are strengthened by His love in the abiding. The abiding is a place where we dine with Jesus and invite others to the table. This is a question that we should ask ourselves: “Do I love Jesus more than these?”--whatever your “these” are. Nelson Price\*\*\* has said, “Jesus Christ often endures our embarrassing abuse, denial, and betrayal only to come back compassionately to restore us to an even more meaningful love relationship with him.” Don’t’ lose yourself on the road between failure and divine forgiveness! Forgiveness and restoration are available to the repentant heart--to deliver us from shame, apathy, brokenness. Because Jesus doesn’t give up on Peter, Peter comes to himself, saying, “Lord, you know all things, you know how I feel about you.” Listen, he would never have been Peter or Peter of Pentecost without this restored Peter on the seashore. Jesus used Peter’s failure to strength him. Likewise, your brokenness doesn’t have to define you. What influences your identity? Remember

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*Agape* means "love-feast," as an expression denoting the brotherly common meals of the early church, though of constant use and in the post-canonical literature from the time of Ignatius onward, is found in the New Testament only in Jude 1:12 and in 2 Peter 2:13 (Bible Study Tools, online).

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*Phileo* means to love, to approve of, to like sanction, to treat affectionately or kindly, to welcome, befriend (Bible Study Tools online)

\*\*\*Nelson Price is Pastor Emeritus, Roswell Street Baptist Church, D.D., Mercer University, 1984 · D. D., Hannibal-LaGrange College, 1990

the great grace of our great God! “17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:17-19). The ministry of reconciliation is offered to us. Remember the value of the soul?! You are not powerful enough to deplete its value! But God continually stands willing and able to redeem and restore.

PASSAGES THAT SUPPORT THIS MESSAGE:

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

14 For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15 And he died for all [so] that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. 16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

John 21:9-19

9 When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. 10 Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you have just caught.” 11 So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. 14 This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.” 16 Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.” 17 The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. 18 Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” 19 Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!”