

John 21:1-19

A four-year-old friend held up her finger to show me a little bandage that covered some minor injury. “Owie,” I said. “How did that happen?”

“Grandma did it,” she said.

I know her grandma. Grandma would rather eat her own head than cause even a scratched finger to *any* child, much less to her granddaughter.

“Oh, I’m sure she didn’t mean to do it,” I said.

“It still hurts.”

“I’ll bet Grandma said she was sorry.”

“Yes,” she said. “But sorry doesn’t make the hurt go away.”

Indeed. Sorry does not make the hurt go away. This grandma probably said she was sorry a dozen times, kissed the boo-boo, and applied antiseptic and the bandage along with hugs and ice cream, but that wouldn’t have been enough to forgive herself for accidentally hurting her first grandchild. Sorry doesn’t make the hurt go away on either side.

Sometimes it is easier to forgive a hurt made *to* us than it is to forgive one made *by* us. Forgiving another can be hard. Forgiving self can sometimes be even harder.

An accidental scratch made by a loving grandma is one thing. What about deeper, emotional hurts people inflict on others with words or acts? Sometimes we can see the effects right away. Sometimes, even years later, the relationship still smarts.

Jesus and Peter had such a hurt between them (John 21). The wise one knew that Peter needed to forgive himself for denying that he knew Jesus. It took up so much space in Peter's heart that he was having trouble moving forward with his faith life. And so, Jesus brings the hurt into the open. Peter is given three opportunities to profess his love (saying sorry in other ways), and three challenges to move forward and leave this trouble behind.

Does the hurt go away? I don't know. But the hurt is fully acknowledged, and then lessened to the point that Peter could get on with his life.

Sorry may not make the hurt go away. But forgiveness of self can put hurt in its rightful place: a place from which we learn and grow.

The story we hear today, two weeks after Easter, is interesting. If you remember correctly last week, Jesus appears for the second time before the disciples, breathes the Spirit into them and says, "Peace be with you." Jesus had called them to follow him about three years earlier at their first interactions. What did they do when Jesus was crucified – they hid for fear of their own demise. Even after appearing to the disciples three times (that is if you include his appearance to Mary Magdalene who is often considered a disciple), the disciples go on their way.

The disciples give up, forget their call, and then return to the Sea of Tiberias or the shores of lake Galilee to the same dull old job: fishing.

The disciples were fishing all night and after daybreak Jesus was standing on the shore but the disciples didn't recognize him.

Jesus watches the disciples. as he does he realizes that they have caught nothing so he says, “throw your nets to the otherside.” Like the fishing story before, the men couldn’t lift the nets in. When the disciples finally bring up there were 153 fish.

The beloved disciple was the first to recognize that it was Jesus and yet again just like Easter morning, after Peter is informed of the appearance of Jesus, he jumps in the water to go and see for himself if it so, before everyone else the others. Then he went back to help bring in the nets.

Jesus invites the disciples to another meal, a breakfast, around a charcoal campfire much like the one where Peter denied knowing Jesus. None of them dared to ask his name because they knew his name.

There are a lot of elements to our story today that I often get asked about. One of the most common why were there 153 fish? Often in scripture numbers are used to signify large amounts. 153 is used to symbolize a lot. Not just a lot like 20 or 50 but a lot of a lot. 153 represents an abundance. Now in places like Revelation another large number used to describe the number of people that will be saved is 144 000. What does that mean, “so many we cannot count.”

In the story today, Jesus shows the disciples love AGAIN by telling the disciples to cast their nets on the other side of their boats for the large catch. He was not doing this simply to help with business, rather the fish were an indication of the amount of love that Jesus still has for them. His love, God’s love, is overflowing and endless.

We know that like the disciples Jesus appears to us when we least expect it. How do you think of Jesus appearing to you in your everyday life? I like to think that Jesus appears to me in the places I find joy. I know like the disciples that Jesus is present and I don't always see him or remember he is there. For example, I know that Jesus is present when I sit outside in the warm sunshine and relax. Jesus is present for many of us during the time we are able to spend with family especially grandchildren. Jesus is present when you receive contact from an old friend.

When finished breakfast Jesus and Peter have one last conversation. The Shepherd says to Peter, "Do you love me?" three times. Peter responds three times, "Yes Lord you know that I love you". Simon then commands, "Feed my lambs; Tend my sheep; and Feed my sheep." Then Jesus for the second time commands Simon Peter to "Follow me."

Simon Peter was shown an extreme amount of love by Jesus, Jesus gives him forgiveness. Jesus gives him a second chance. While sitting around a campfire like the one Peter was sitting around when he denied Jesus three times, Peter professes a renewed love and experiences a new call to discipleship.

Our "campfire" where we come to experience an abundance of love, where we seek forgiveness, confess our love for Christ and God, is here. We come to church to grow closer to God. It is easy to forget that God loves us first. God desires us to be present in this place or connected through hybrid worship. God desires for us to

experience daily the outpouring of love at the font and baptism. The place where God comes down to meet all of us and God desires for us to experience ultimate love shown to us at the altar and Holy Communion.

Each week come to hear Jesus' command, "follow me". As you leave today know that God's abundant love surrounds you. From day to day ask yourselves, "where do you see Jesus?" Examine how you are living your call to discipleship. Then ask, "how can I follow Jesus?" Amen.