

RESURRECTING POWER: BROKENNESS RESTORED

Sermon written by Martha-Jean Fitch

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TEXT: John 21

Audrey Hepburn was a 20th century British actress – famous for her role as Eliza Dolittle in the movie “My Fair Lady”. She was a woman of beauty, both inside and out, and was even inducted into the International Best Dressed Hall of Fame! She was once asked to share her beauty tips. So, she wrote out a poem that included those tips – and just a few years later – these beauty tips were read at her funeral. Her words went like this:

For attractive lips, speak words of kindness.
For lovely eyes, seek out the good in people.
For a slim figure, share your food with the hungry.
For beautiful hair, let a child run his/her fingers through it once a day.
For poise, walk with the knowledge that you never walk alone.
If you ever need a helping hand, you will find one at the end of each of your arms.
You will discover that you have two hands; one for helping yourself, and the other for helping others
Remember, people, even more than things, have to be restored, renewed, revived, reclaimed, and redeemed; never throw out anyone.

While these words are not from Scripture – they certainly sound like they could have been inspired by the words of Christ...especially in the last line that affirms how precious each person is: God never throws anyone out – but is continually reaching out to restore, renew, reclaim and redeem His beloved children. No one is ever too guilty, too broken – too lost. God’s incredible love and mercy keeps on reaching and searching – all the way to where we are. That is the resurrecting hope we all have – that our brokenness can be restored!

This truth is seen incredibly in the life of Simon Peter. Simon – one of the 12 disciples that had so boldly declared that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Jesus had praised him for this bold confession of faith and then changed his name to Peter, which means rock. Peter had a solid – rock-like faith – that believed in Jesus as the Christ. And that kind of faith, Jesus said, is the foundation upon which He would build the church.

Now you would think that from then on – Peter would be this “rock of Gibraltar” kind of leader. Never wavering in his faith – always standing by Jesus, serving him faithfully. But that is really not the case. In fact, Jesus predicted that Peter would deny Him. But Peter declared that even if everyone else deserted Him and denied Him – He never would! But things certainly changed as the crucifixion drew near.

Turn in your Bible to the New Testament, to the gospel of John and let’s look real quickly at what happened to Peter after Jesus was arrested. We’re going to just glance through chapter

18. We talked about this part of Peter's life just a few weeks ago. So, this is just a brief review to remind us of what happened to Peter right before Jesus was crucified.

Look at verses 15 through 18 of the 18th chapter of John. It says:

¹⁵Simon Peter followed Jesus as did another of the disciples. He was acquainted with the high priest, so he was allowed to enter the high priest courtyard with Jesus. ¹⁶Peter had to stay outside the gate. Then the disciple who knew the high priest spoke to the woman watching at the gate, and she let Peter in. ¹⁷The woman asked Peter, "You're not one of that man's disciples, are you?" "No," he said, "I am not." ¹⁸Because it was cold, the household servants and the guards had made a charcoal fire. They stood around it, warming themselves, and Peter stood with them, warming himself.

This was the first time he denied knowing Jesus. Now look what happens in verses 25 to 27:

²⁵Meanwhile, as Simon Peter was standing by the fire warming himself, they asked him again, "You're not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it, saying, "No, I am not." ²⁶But one of the household slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Didn't I see you out there in the olive grove with Jesus?" ²⁷Again Peter denied it. And immediately a rooster crowed."

It doesn't say it here in this gospel, but in other gospels it says that after denying Jesus three times, Peter left the courtyard, weeping bitterly. Peter wasn't there when Jesus was crucified - he fled and deserted him even though he had boastfully declared that he would never leave him. Can you imagine the shame he must have felt? The discouragement the overwhelming sense of failure?

When we come to the story in the scripture reading today, we find that Peter has gotten off track off of his mission. He hasn't lived up to his name Peter ... not yet. He hasn't been sturdy like a rock nor had he gone out to share the good news about Jesus. No- instead he's just gone back to what he knew before he ever met Jesus. He's gone fishing.

Often, when Christians feel that they have betrayed Jesus, and are feeling crushed with guilt, they withdraw to what they knew before Christ. They return to their default setting. You see Satan really wants to get believers out of service, out of worship, out of the church. He lies to them and convinces them that God really does not love them or can never use them anymore. When we live in this place, we don't know peace or power. We are in despair and defeat. But God loves us enough not to leave us there. So, Jesus comes to Peter to take off this weight of guilt and get him back on track.²

As dawn was breaking, Jesus called to the disciples from the shore...even though they couldn't see at first that it was Jesus. Jesus tells them to throw out their nets on the right side of the boat and they would get some fish. After catching a miraculously, huge net of fish, Jesus calls out to Peter and the other disciples and invites them to come for breakfast. Look at verse 9

of the gospel of John, chapter 21. There we read: *“when they got there, they found breakfast waiting for them - fish cooking over a charcoal fire, and some bread.”* (John 21:9)

Now what's interesting is that there are only two places where a charcoal fire is mentioned in the New Testament: here in this passage and at the courtyard of the high priest where Peter denied knowing Jesus three times.

Can't you just imagine what Peter must have been thinking? Perhaps he went toward the charcoal fire and thought, “Wow! This is just like déjà vu! I was standing at a fire just like this not too long ago and was asked if I was a disciple of Jesus. What is Jesus going to say about me denying him? Will he be upset with me? Will he deny knowing *me*?”

Do you have a time in your life where you have betrayed Jesus? Do you have a sin that when it comes to your memory, you drop your head, and you feel the weight of regret? You've turned your back on Him – you've gone against what He wants for you. Maybe you've stumbled so much that you wonder if God could ever use you again? Do you ever just put your head in your hands and cry out, “why did I do that?”

God does not want to leave us there – He wants to lift your head and for you to walk in honor before Him. God was not going to leave Peter with this crushing weight of guilt. And God does not want to leave *you* where *you* are. He wants to take the weight away. Jesus went to this beach to talk with Peter. God has come to you this morning and wants you to hear His word of grace and mercy!

Notice how Jesus talks to Peter, there at the charcoal fire. Look at John 21:15:

¹⁵ *After breakfast Jesus asked Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” Peter replied, “you know I love you.” “Then feed my lambs,” Jesus told him. ¹⁶Jesus repeated the question: “Simon son of John, do you love me?” “Yes, Lord,” Peter said, “you know I love you.” “Then take care of my sheep,” Jesus said.¹⁷ A third time he asked him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt that Jesus asked the question a third time. He said, “Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Then feed my sheep.”*

Simon, son of John, do you love me? Notice that Jesus didn't call him Peter in this passage. He knew Simon had not been living up to the name He had given him – Peter the rock. He had been wavering, denying, failing. He wasn't fulfilling his mission. But Jesus doesn't condemn him. He doesn't even ask, “why did you fail me? Or why did you deny me?” No, Jesus wanted to know – “do you love me more than all these? Do you really love me?” Three times He asked the same question which gave Peter the chance to say, “yes, I love you!”, three times in return. One by one, each answer seemed to cancel out the three times he had denied ever knowing Jesus. And after each question, Jesus gave Peter an assignment: “Feed My lambs. Take care of My sheep. Feed My sheep.”

Jesus doesn't leave Peter broken. He seeks him out, offering NOT condemnation, but restoration. Jesus offered Peter that great gift of grace and forgiveness. He gave him that second chance to prove that he could be steady and sure like a rock in his faith. And then He

called him just as He had three years earlier, to “come and follow me”. Jesus restored Peter and recommissioned him to reach out and care for others – showing the love of Jesus.

Perhaps you have had times when you have stumbled in life – failing to be the person that God created you to be. We need to remember the story of Peter’s restoration. Peter failed when he denied knowing Jesus. But, as Max Lucado says, *“Luckily for Peter and luckily for us, our failures are not fatal in God's economy.”* Max continues to describe it this way: *“Jesus gives Peter a second chance. Christ restored Peter ... with three personal commissions to feed my sheep. 3 denials -3 commissionings. Jesus still had work for Peter to do. Yes, Peter was discouraged by his failures but he wasn't disqualified by his failures. Have you felt disqualified by yours? Have your fumbles left you questioning God's place for you in His plan? Somehow you got tangled up in stuff and garbage and you've been avoiding God. You've allowed a veil of guilt to come between you and your heavenly Father and you wonder if you could ever feel close to God again. Friend, the message of Jesus' torn flesh on the tree is you can God welcomes you. He's not avoiding you. God is not resisting you -- in fact He is inviting you to trust the message of the cross - that you are welcome in God's presence and He is waiting to restore you and lavish upon you a second chance.”*³

Jesus restored Peter in His brokenness. And He can do the same in your life. Wherever you feel broken, filled with guilt or shame – perhaps overwhelmed with darkness and grief, pain and loss – remember this message of the second chance. You always have help you always have hope because you have the grace of Christ. Jesus can restore your brokenness with His resurrection power and hope.

PRAYER

INVITATION

RESOURCES:

¹Story of Beauty Tips of Audrey Hepburn quoted in sermon by Perry Greene.

<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermon-illustrations/83827/audrey-hepburn-s-beauty-tips-by-perry-greene>

²Drew Boswell “Starting Over – John 21:15-19”.

<https://drewboswell.com/starting-over-john-2115-19/>

³Max Lucado, “The Gospel of Second Chance”, maxlucado.com.