

John 21  
Preached at Stone Church of Willow Glen by Rev. Fred Harrell  
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## Breakfast for Failures

Christmas Tree Lane. Stealing 52 light bulbs. My parents' response?

I love you.

You will replace every last bulb and apologize while doing it to each person on the block.

My parents weren't perfect but perhaps their greatest gift was given to me that day. I knew I could fail and they would love me. Parents look for this opportunity with your kids. But really for all of us. Failure is an opportunity to LOVE.

And there are so many other options, aren't there? Shame, blame, resentment, rejection, passive aggressive behavior, writing people off. But my parents saw my failure as an opportunity to love me. The truest, the most powerful friendships you have ever had in your life are the ones where failure coexists with love.

Peter had failed. He had told Jesus, "I'll never deny you!" Jesus told him, "Yes you will!" And indeed he did. Three times. And here we are around two weeks later. Jesus shows up on the shore while they are fishing.

In the midst of our failures, how does God make His presence known? Here's our blueprint: Jesus manifests Himself to us amidst our shortcomings through **Community, Compassion, and Commission.**

Initially, let's look at **community**. Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples - quite the ensemble. Imagine yourself among them. What might they be discussing? Perhaps reminiscing over the past three years? Possibly, they're gripped with fear, realizing they're now associated with someone who suffered state-sponsored and religiously endorsed execution. The fate of Jesus could easily become theirs. Persecution lurks ominously. The trauma of recent events weighs heavily upon them.

Whatever they are talking about, one thing is crystal clear. They needed each other for survival.

So. Do. We. That little boat is every church that has ever existed. Because Christian community is honestly a gathering of failures who need each other and God's grace, because truth be told, every church is a group of people who are largely failing miserably at following Jesus.

Welcome to Stone Church! Hope this is encouraging! If you are new here I want to set your expectations well... we are all human beings, none of us saints, and all of us in need of grace at every second. And sometimes, just sometimes, we really show up for each other in remarkable ways.

Here's my point: You need others who know Jesus in your life in order for you to know Jesus the way you need to! Especially to deal with your inevitable failures. You need a team of people to convince you that God's grace and love are for you because we so easily forget.

Question: Are your failures *crushing* you instead of *teaching* you because you have isolated yourself in your Christian journey and experience to just yourself? Or maybe you are isolated but not by your choice? What might it look like for you to see your Christian commitments as something that must be done together with others who are doing the same?

Next, Jesus approached them, and us, amidst their failures with **compassion**. Now, what does that entail?

*John 21:4-6 Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish.*

Now, if you have been around these Jesus stories, this may sound familiar. There's a place in Luke 5, early in Jesus's ministry where this same thing happens. Same problem: no fish. Same solution: Jesus tells them to throw their nets and they have so much fish they can barely haul it in.

Here's the contrast: Peter's reaction. In Luke 5, at the onset of Jesus' ministry, Peter falls down in fear, recognizing Jesus' divinity. Fast forward three years to John 21, encountering the resurrected Jesus, Peter's response might be seen as falling down in gratitude. However, he does something unexpected — he leaps into the water and swims *toward* Jesus, the very person he had previously let down. Perhaps, on this side of the cross and resurrection, Peter comprehends that he is a *cherished failure*.

Question: In the midst of your failure, which voice holds sway over your thoughts? This voice is running your life, shaping how you respond to stress, anxiety, adversity, work, parenting, and life's unforeseen hurdles. Perhaps it's the voice of a condemning parent, a critical friend, or even your own inner dialogue — few are as harsh on us as we are on ourselves, it seems.

I'm convinced this is connected to how we construct our self-image.

Basing it on your performance ... where any failure, reminder of weaknesses, or perceived "lack" feels like a crushing blow. You may say, "Oh I don't let it bother me when I fail," but you are betrayed by your actions. You become sensitive, reactive, and inclined to conceal, much like the initial individuals depicted in Genesis 1.

Embracing the gospel of God's Grace ... here, you live with the awareness that you are inherently precious to God. Your failures and flaws only deepen your appreciation of God's boundless love for you. Consequently, you can become the kind of friend, parent, colleague who others feel safe failing with too!

How do you know if you are becoming like Jesus? That's the goal right? Christlikeness? So, and this is a hard one: **When others fail do they move toward you or away from you? Ask someone who will be honest with you.**

**Thirdly**, Peter required more than just community and compassion. He needed assurance of his continued significance in God's Kingdom. Jesus brought forth a **commission**, reaffirming Peter's role in His service.

Our memory is connected to our sense of smell. I went on Google for this:

*The sense of smell is closely linked with memory, probably more so than any of our other senses. Scents bypass the thalamus and go straight to the brain's smell center, known as the olfactory bulb. The olfactory bulb is directly connected to the amygdala and hippocampus, which might explain why the smell of something can so immediately trigger a detailed memory or even intense emotion.*

When Peter was denying Jesus, he did so over a charcoal fire. At this breakfast, that same smell of charcoal (same Greek word) is in the air. Imagine Peter emerging from the water with the smell of his failure in the air. Some analysts suggest that Jesus orchestrated this deliberately, indicating His intention to extend grace while also aiming for Peter's restoration. Those familiar with recovery journeys understand this concept deeply and have valuable lessons to offer. Confronting failure directly and traversing through it, rather than avoiding it, is essential.

Jesus asked him three times, the same number of denials, "Peter do you love me?" Peter answered three times. "Yes I love you." What might Peter be thinking? I wanted to love you in my success ... I was there after all. But I love you in my failure. I wanted to love you in my heroic loyalty, but I love you in my denial.

Jesus is for anybody who desperately needs to know you can love someone in your failure, imperfection, and denial. Which would be all of us. God can and will use this kind of honest, real, and imperfect love. I think by doing this Jesus is opening up Peter's capacity for love. Flawed people who love others well can change lives. Isn't it good news to you today to hear that your imperfect love for God ... for others ... is still love?

Peter, who boldly declared he would never deny Jesus, has now been freed from that misguided confidence and arrogance. He no longer feels the need to prove himself, defend himself, conquer, or win approval. "I have achieved everything on your behalf, Peter. Can you now trust me when I promise never to abandon you?" Peter's transformation is irreversible.

You will never be the same when you realize deep in your bones that the God you worship, the God we worship here each week, the God revealed in Jesus Christ... is a God who makes breakfast for failures. Amen.