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**Peter's Redemption**  
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For Mary Magdalene, all it took was hearing the Risen Christ speak her name and she not only recognized the Risen Jesus, she believed, and accepted his command to tell others that Jesus was raised from the dead. For Thomas, it was being invited by the Risen Christ to touch the wounds of the crucifixion that made him see the Risen Jesus, receive the Holy Spirit, and believe in the new life the Risen Christ was calling all his disciples into. But for one disciple it would be much more difficult. That disciple is the one we heard about in today's Gospel: the disciple Jesus himself had called The Rock, and he didn't mean former wrestler and movie star Dwayne Johnson, he meant the guy who used to be called Simon but to whom Jesus gave the name Peter. Jesus even promised to build the foundation of his church on Peter. But as we saw in today's Gospel, Peter was not so quick to follow the Risen Jesus. Instead, he went fishing.

There are lots of theories about why Peter left Jerusalem and the upper room after seeing the Risen Jesus twice only to return to the Sea of Tiberias and his former occupation and go fishing. Some say Peter and the 7 disciples mentioned at the beginning of today's Gospel were still trying to process the impossible reality they had encountered, and when you are struggling to accept a new reality, sometimes doing an activity you are familiar with helps you process things better. Others say since the Risen Jesus neglected to provide his followers with a set of directions detailing specific steps as to what to do after his resurrection, Peter and some of Jesus disciples didn't know what to do, and instead of waiting around and being told, they decided to do what they knew they could do and went back to fishing. There's nothing wrong with these theories. But there are scholars who wonder if there is much sadder reason for Peter's change of location and activity. They believe Peter had intentionally separated himself from the Risen Jesus and his mission, left it all behind him, and returned to fishing because he didn't believe he belonged anywhere else doing anything else. And while this is certainly a disheartening theory, the scholars that propose it seem to have been paying attention to Peter throughout the Gospels and have fairly good observations to support their theory.

If you remember, Peter, a fisherman, was one of the very first disciples Jesus called to follow him back in the beginning of the Gospels, especially in John's Gospel. Not only was Peter one of the first to be called, Peter was always among the select inner circle of Jesus' followers that Jesus invited to go along with him on those excursions where he went up a mountain to be transfigured or when he broke off from the main group to go and heal someone. Peter was one of the disciples who saw all of

Jesus' ministry, heard every parable, saw every miraculous interaction. Yet, despite being present, Peter also seemed to miss the obvious, or at least what might seem obvious to us. When Jesus was transfigured on the mountain with Moses and Elijah, it was Peter who offered to build three tents to make the moment last, instead of just being in the moment or understanding what it meant. He seemed to struggle with the meaning behind the parables Jesus told. And it was those last days of Jesus that really stand out as the days when Peter seemed to always get it wrong. Peter might have been happy to cheer Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and help make it as triumphant as possible, but he wasn't keen to have Jesus wash his feet at the last supper. Remember, it was Peter who seemed to miss the point of the foot washing entirely; first refusing to let Jesus wash his feet, then after Jesus explained what he was doing, in his eagerness to please, or desire to be the best, or whatever motivated his devoted enthusiasm, Peter told Jesus to wash his whole body. Jesus' explanation that Peter didn't need his whole body washed seemed to escape him. And he didn't take seriously or believe Jesus when Jesus predicted Peter would deny him three times before daybreak.

In the garden after the Last Supper, Jesus asked Peter to stay awake and pray with him, but we all remember Peter couldn't keep his eyes open and fell asleep. When the crowds came to arrest Jesus, Peter responded with violence by drawing a sword and cutting off the ear of a slave of the high priest. He must have been quite dumbfounded when Jesus told him to put his sword away. Peter's intentions must have been noble when he went into the courtyard of the high priest for Jesus' trial. He probably wanted to stay close to Jesus, to see what happened. But when he was recognized by the light and warmth of a charcoal fire, Peter – just as Jesus had predicted – denied that he knew Jesus. In John's Gospel Peter's denial is even more severe. In John's Gospel, Peter was asked if he was a disciple of Jesus, if he was part of Jesus' movement and ministry, and that is what Peter denied. And when he heard the rooster crow, that sound of the morning coming, and Jesus turned to look at Peter, he ran off weeping.

It seems whatever Peter set out to do concerning Jesus, he didn't actually do it the way he must have wanted or expected. We must be careful in how we judge Peter, for that is not our place and this is his story. And we need to remember that people in Jesus' day expected a warrior Messiah, not a Suffering and Resurrected Messiah. Peter seems to have one of those personalities where when given the chance, he will work hard to prove himself, or he will work hard to make what he thinks should happen, happen. Although, sometimes he seemed to have had such an intense focus that he missed what was happening around him. And when it came to the night of Jesus arrest and trial, Peter was probably not just afraid but terrified that

he might suffer the same fate as Jesus if he was recognized as being part of Jesus' mission and ministry. And when we act out of fear, we can do all sorts of things we regret later. That is why scholars believe Peter left Jerusalem after seeing the Risen Jesus; he was not able to forgive himself for denying Jesus and being part of Jesus' ministry, and no longer felt like he deserved to be part of it.

If we look a little closer, we might even see something like ourselves in Peter. Peter seemed to be the type of person who sought to avoid what might lead to suffering or pain, which might be why he tried to control situations, or acted the way he did so often. And Peter might have been very hard on himself when he realized Jesus really was raised from the dead and he had failed to be as faithful as he had wanted to be.

Remember Peter had been very involved in the events of the morning Mary Magdalene discovered the tomb Jesus had been buried in was empty. She ran and got Peter and the other disciple, and they ran back to the tomb with her. He even went into the empty tomb and saw it for himself. Then he received Mary Magdalene's message that she had seen and spoken with the Risen Jesus. Later that same day, Peter was in the room when the Risen Jesus appeared to everyone in the room. Peter was in that same room when Jesus appeared the second time, and invited Thomas to touch those crucifixion wounds. Peter had been present for the amazing visits from the Risen Jesus, but for Peter, it seems that wasn't enough to undo what he himself had done.

Peter's story is a powerful one, because it shows us something very important about the Resurrection. It shows us the Resurrection of Jesus by itself is not magic; it doesn't just wipe out the pain and mistakes and failures of the past. Instead, it does something far better, far more life giving, it redeems them. And in order for this redemption to happen, we must let the Risen Christ into the very source of our pain, regret, and failures, just like what happened to Peter in today's Gospel when he went fishing and failed to catch any fish.

But then the Risen Jesus appeared on the beach, and like every resurrection story, no one knew it was Jesus right away. And the Risen Jesus seems to be okay with this. Instant recognition doesn't seem to be part of the purpose of Resurrection accounts in the Gospels. It was only when the nets were full of fish when they shouldn't have been that caused them to recognize the Risen Jesus. And that seems to move Peter deeply, causing him to abandon the task he himself started in order to swim to the shore to get close to the Risen Jesus. Perhaps Peter realized that this time the Risen Jesus had come just for him and that made him feel joy.

When Peter met the Risen Jesus on the beach, he was standing somewhere very significant for Peter: next to a charcoal fire. It was next to such a fire that Peter had denied knowing Jesus and denied being his follower. It is where Peter failed to love his Lord. And we can see what the Risen Jesus did with such a significant symbol of pain. He used it for a different purpose: to cook fish and share that fish with Peter and the other disciples. And after everyone ate, because for the Risen Jesus, it seems the work of redemption doesn't happen on an empty stomach, Jesus and Peter had a very significant conversation. Where Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved him, for the three times Peter was asked if he knew Jesus and was part of his ministry. But Jesus does more than simply reverse Peter's denials, and Jesus doesn't just forgive Peter, for that was done back in the upper room. There was something richer than forgiveness happening beside that charcoal fire that still smelled like cooked fish. There was redemption. Jesus went to the deepest part and source of Peter's pain, regret, shame, disappointment that Jesus hadn't been the Messiah he had expected or wanted him to be, whatever it was that had prevented Peter from accepting the Risen Christ when he appeared before. Jesus went into that moment that had been so very hard for Peter, and lifted Peter from it by restoring Peter to his ministry, calling him once again to follow him. Only now he called Peter to follow the Risen Christ, and to step up into a role of leadership he may not have felt worthy to be in.

That is what redemption is: it is the Risen Jesus not just forgiving us, but going with us to our worst moments, our failures, our catastrophes, our lowest moments, and being with us, forgiving us, and lifting us up, restoring us to the Love of God and the life God wants for us. It's not just a new or fresh start, it's a movement toward the Kingdom of God, recognizing people are not disposable; even when they fail, God may not be through with them, and the worst can be redeemed. That is Peter's story. And that is the foundation the Church is built on: redemption. The knowledge that sometimes we all fail, even the church, and when it fails, the church can look to the Risen Jesus, restore our reliance on Christ, and let Christ lift us up, to try again, hopefully this time with greater humility.

The same can be said for individuals; perhaps you know someone who has experienced redemption or have been so magnificently blessed to have experienced being lifted from despair into redemption yourself. Peter's story can be the story of the church, and the story for any of us. These are the stories we can and need to share to show that part of power of Jesus resurrection is that it truly does destroy the power of death and the power of failure, and creates new life of redemption that is the hope we need and is the stuff of God's Kingdom here on earth.