

What is your favorite Biblical teaching?

God so loved the world...

Love your neighbor as you love yourself

Love One another as I have loved you

For me it has always been "Try try again." I had to ask my wife 3 times before she agreed to marry me. I was baptized, confirmed and ordained. Even more, the sweetest pleasure is not simply to succeed, but to be redeemed finding new success after loss. When I first came to our church, people kept commenting about "He is always smiling!" The fact of the matter is that after 35 years of incredible successes, I went through a year of hardship and unemployment, so I am thrilled to be your pastor! Thank you!

We have a tendency to perceive faith events as Mountaintop experiences. A decisive moment when we act in faith or not; when we were saved; when we were Baptized; when we got married...

BUT the Bible is filled with re-commissionings, of the lost being found, of being loved after we have failed.

My father's favorite sermon was titled "The God of New Beginnings," in which he described:

After Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden, God commissioned them to Populate the World!

After Cain's offering was Rejected and he Murdered his brother, Cain became the father of a Great Nation.

After 40 days and 40 Nights aboard the Ark, Noah got Drunk, yet God commissioned Noah to be fruitful.

After David presumptuously wanted to build God's House, God made David Father of the House of Israel.

After David committed Adultery, God commissioned David and Bathsheba to give birth to King Solomon.

Only after Elijah was suicidal, did God commission the prophet to Call new Kings, Priests and Prophets.

My father always started that sermon reading the story of Balaam's Ass, describing that his son's favorite TV Show was about a Talking Horse. When I was 7 I was delighted to be named in his sermon! When I was 17, I was less than thrilled. When I was 37, I suggested he get a new Sermon illustration.

John's Gospel has always been rather ODD.

John routinely makes reference to "The Beloved Disciple" as compared to Judas, Peter, John, Thomas, etc.

The Beloved Disciple outruns Peter to the Tomb and instantly sees and believes, where Peter is confused.

In Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus walks all over Galilee, through Gentile Cities of Rome and Samaria;

whereas, in John's Gospel Jesus talks a lot... about the Good Shepherd, and being the Bread of Life.

In the other Gospels Jesus dies and is resurrected. In John Jesus appears to the Women, then twice in the Upper Room, and here on the Gentile shore of the Sea of Galilee (called Tiberius), and despite this, the Disciples NEVER recognize him from Life or from an earlier Resurrection appearance.

In this passage we need to interpret what we think is going on... Possibly Peter says, I need something familiar, there has been a great deal of loss in my life, SO, I am going back to Fishing.

OR quite possibly, Peter says I give up, I betrayed Jesus, I am going out alone, on the water, in the dark...

And six of the other disciples reply "You are not going alone, we are going with you!"

If Peter was looking for something familiar, recall how when you have tried to go back to something you used to do, it is not the same, in both our abilities as well as how we feel about that task.

If Peter was DEPRESSED, at those times we tend to not perform well. Either way, THEY CATCH NOTHING. And what does Jesus say to them: "IT'S OKAY, TRY AGAIN ON THE OTHER SIDE!"

Typical of John's Gospel there is an Abundance!

I want to offer a corrective here, because I have often read this passage as about FORGIVENESS of SIN.

BUT Jesus never offers Peter FORGIVENESS! And Peter never confesses or says I am Sorry...

Peter had not betrayed Jesus, as Judas had done. Peter was asked "ARE YOU ONE OF THEM" and Peter denied his own IDENTITY, Peter betrayed himself by saying "I AM NOT!"

Smells and Feelings rekindle Memories. The Night Jesus was arrested and Convicted, PETER WAS COLD, it was DARK, and Peter was BESIDE A FIRE in the COURTYARD. Do you recall the smell from Embers of a fire? Can you feel the blanket of DARKNESS when you are afraid? Have you ever been chilled to the bone? NOW Peter is on the Shore with Jesus, it is not yet SUNRISE, it is COLD, and there is a FIRE's WARMTH and SMELL.

Just as with PETER, Jesus offers us a SIMPLE MEAL. But what Jesus is doing is inviting back into Community. That invitation comes with forgiveness of any of the STUFF THAT HAS HAPPENED.

But more, this is entrusting new IDENTITY, New RESPONSIBILITY and New PURPOSE, RE-COMMISSIONING.

There is a great tragedy, that regularly we do not tell people how important they are in our lives! We wait until they are dead, to confess//or to ask forgiveness for our past. We confess our LOVE and COMMITMENT when we get married, never to say those words again. Perhaps we were Ordained 22 years ago, or 38, and have not thought about that EXAMINATION and COMMISSIONING, testing our faith, since.

So, this morning, I would like us to consider a RE-COMMISSIONING, reflecting on our life and faith...

How many of you, like me, have been at OUR CHURCH about 3 years or LESS? Realize that that is all the time that the Disciples had had with Jesus? They were on a Journey through the unknown and we have been! DO YOU LOVE THE LORD? Feed my Lambs!

How many of you have been here more than 3 years but less than 13? You cared for OUR CHURCH during times of hostility and members leaving; of the Administrative Commission and an Austerity Budget; through Pastor Larry's death; through Pastor Paul's resignation; through the Interim Pastorate; and the last 3 years. DO YOU LOVE THE LORD? Tend my Sheep!

How many of you go back before that, possibly even as Charter Members? You cared for OUR CHURCH, not only with Pastor Joe Hawkins and John Ross and George Pike; but through two Building Programs; and all the rest! DO YOU LOVE THE LORD? Feed my Sheep!

There is one more obscure point that jumps out in this passage. Jesus tells Peter that Peter has been in control of his own identity all his life; but IN DEATH TO COME, others will take him where he does not want to go. Someone asked me the other week, about the Martyrdom of Jesus' Disciples? YES, Peter was eventually taken to Rome, where although he too was condemned to death, Peter had described that through Jesus the World was shown to be upside down, so he was nailed to the Cross with a belt around his waist to be Crucified upside down.

Reflecting on this Passage: Frederick Buechner once described: "I have always trusted God with my life. Now, I begin at least to trust God with my death." And I want to affirm the opposite as well. Many of us have trusted God with after-death, the hard part is continually re-committing to Trust God with our Life.