

Series: "Corona...Corona"

Sermon: "Forty-Day Lessons for Dirty Feet"

Text: John 21

RG2ND/FBCCS/5-17-20 UNEDITED

- This sermon started out of a mistake. Not having grown up in a liturgical church, I never really paid much attention to the official church calendar and things like "Lent." Ash Wednesday, which kicks off the 40-day Lenten season, was a mystery to me. The smudged foreheads seemed strange to me but at least they marked a person as willing to publicly associate with Jesus Christ and Christianity.
- The mistake was having in my head that the 40 days Jesus showed himself alive, following his death, burial and resurrection, was somehow aligned with the same 40 days of Lent. I guess I never paid close enough attention to realize this is not the case.
- The 40 days of Lent are finished at or just before Easter and the 40 days of living proof are after Easter. No big deal. If that were the worst mistake I ever made, I'd be a very happy man.
- What does this mistake have to do with this sermon? Not very much except that, unfortunately, Lent's 40 days can illustrate for many the opposite of what I think the one very special event nearer the end of the 40 days of living "proof" is carefully and powerfully illustration.
- It is an important reality of real LIFE in Christ that the Apostle John strongly emphasized in his gospel and his 1<sup>st</sup> epistle.
- It is a truth that can truly "set us free" in times when we are not sure we are making all the right choices and especially when some of those choices we make are sinful.
- There can be discomfoting side effects of having a believer's life shaken-up by change like we are experiencing today beyond the need to face change.
- In the gold—finding show I watched last night, an historical change in the ice melting patterns of the frozen sea, shifted currents that stirred up the shallow seabed and uncovered gold that had been hidden under sand and rocks.

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- Some folks I talk with are discovering that the disruptive change they are facing has stirred up the seabed of their relationship with God and not everything exposed underneath shines like precious gold.
- Many carry a sense of guilt and "failure" over deep, sinful patterns that are now lie exposed.
- Others are downhearted because they feel they have "failed" in how they have handled the choices and the stress that have come into their lives in these times of upheaval.
- The Apostle John, as much as Paul or Peter, and maybe more had a heart to tell believers they did not have to live under a cloud of "failure" in their relationship with God. The truth he teaches, applied to our lives by seeing its reality through eyes of faith, is one of the most joyous truths that distinguishes biblical Christianity from any other religion.
- How does God want us to act when we feel have failed him? What are we to do about that failure?
- The reason the Season of Lent comes to mind here, is that many, not all, but many who celebrate Lent do so thinking they are making up for sin—they are doing what God wants them to do to deal with the failure.
- Depending which branch of the churches that celebrate Lent a person is part of, the observance of the 40 days of Lent can take different forms. But, to one degree or another all forms include some manner of "fasting." All include giving up something for a time.
- Fasting, giving up food and maybe even food and drink for a time to focus on something God is saying or doing is Biblical as long as we don't do it with great public drama to show people how "spiritual" we are. That was a practice of the Pharisees and their flesh-eyes that Jesus roundly condemned.

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- Of course, Jesus himself fasted. The 40 days of Lent are meant to be a depiction of the 40 days Jesus fasted in the wilderness as he focused on God's mission versus the counterfeit mission suggested as a pragmatic option by the deceiver.
- Today, for Lent, some folks, rather than not eating like Jesus, fast in more of a token way by giving up something they enjoy like chocolate, or booze for the 40 days.
- Others, fast by giving up a specific sin for 40 days—something such as gossiping or losing their temper with their loved ones. I assume that, after the 40 days, they feel free to pick up sinning in these ways right where they left off.
- Some who fast this way with giving up chocolate or gossip have the theology that they are atoning for their "failures" with this sacrifice. This is how God wants them to deal with failing him.
- Others see it as a sincere message to God of their seriousness, their depth of understanding and sorrow, over their evil failures so God will know how badly they truly feel. And, to them, this is how God wants them to deal with failing him.
- These ideas of how God wanted believers to deal with their sinful failures reached a strange level during the middle ages with the religious practice of "self-flagellation."
- One writer describes the meaning behind this inflicting of physical pain on oneself: "The **Flagellants** were religious zealots of the Middle Ages in Europe who demonstrated their religious fervor and sought atonement for their sins by vigorously whipping themselves in public *displays of penance*. **This approach to achieving redemption was most popular during times of crisis.**

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- Did you catch that? In times of crisis, it seemed especially important to some to prove to God how serious they were about their failures and to self-atone for them with self-inflicted physical sacrifice.
- Again, not all who participate in Lent today do it for these reasons but this is common, popular theology. *"I'm giving up chocolate for 40 days, O, God, to prove how serious I am about my failures. I am giving up Starbucks lattes for 40 days, O, Lord, to at least help pay for my failures and sins."*
- But, what did the Apostle John help us see? Is this how God wants us to deal with a heightened sense of "failure" that often comes in times of crisis?
- During that other 40 days, the 40 days of proof when Jesus showed himself to his disciples offers us a well-known example that would be good to recall today. It is found in that seemingly appended last chapter of John's Gospel—chapter 21.
- It is the extended description of what happened when Jesus showed himself exclusively to his closest disciples for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time since rising from the dead.
- I am mainly interested in one section but the description is so wonderful and so loaded with theology and practical applications, I want to read to you the larger context in which this one section is found.
- Look at **John 21:1** with me please to begin...  
**21**Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way: <sup>2</sup> Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. <sup>3</sup> "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

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- Remember, Jesus gave instructions to go Galilee and he would meet them there. So here they are fishing in the freshwater "sea" or "lake Tiberius" also known as the "Sea of Galilee," which is, of course in Galilee where he said, "meet me."
- It is still in the 40 day period post-resurrection/pre-ascension. It is still in a time of crisis for these guys but things seem to be settling down some. Peter suggests they do something they know how to do, fish. Crisis or no crisis, they have to eat. Jesus is not around to miraculously multiply some kid's lunch to feed them now. Or is he?
- As sometimes happens to fishermen, even professionals as some of them were, they had fished for quite some time and caught nothing. I suspect this may have been disheartening and not have put them in the best of moods. **Now verse 4...**

**<sup>4</sup> Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.**

**<sup>5</sup> He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?"**

**"No," they answered.**

**<sup>6</sup> He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.**

- Some say they didn't recognize him because, here and on the road to Emmaus, God had blocked them for recognizing him. Others say it was early morning, the light was dim, they had been up all night, they weren't expecting Jesus to be camping on the shore, and so they just didn't quite put it together from 300 feet away in the morning mist.
- Jesus calls to them with an interesting word that usually means something like "kids!" or maybe "lads!" in the British sense, but in a very friendly manner.

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- He tells them where to fish. It wasn't very far away than where their professional skills had led them—just the other side of the boat. Bingo! They caught so many fish, as strong as they were, they couldn't haul them into the boat in the net.
- Fish with your own best, professional wisdom and you won't catch anything. Fish with Jesus, and his wisdom (even if it is just the other side of the boat) and you won't be able to lift the abundant catch. Might this apply to "fish" that walk upright on two-feet on land?

**<sup>7</sup> Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. <sup>8</sup> The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. <sup>9</sup> When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.**

**<sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught."**

**<sup>11</sup> Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. <sup>12</sup> Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup> Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. <sup>14</sup> This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.**

- Every one of the men Jesus picked was different. Here that is highlighted as John the writer who calls himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved" catches on quickly as always—as he did back in the tomb. "This is the LORD!"
- Peter, never quick to catch on, is still Peter the man of quick action. He makes himself a bit more presentable, jumps in, and since Jesus is going to let him walk on water this time, swims the 100 yards to shore. "*Let the other guys row the boat in!*"

- Jesus invites them to join their fish (which he had provided) with his fish—sort of a “fishy partnership”—to supply their need to eat. The catch was so spectacular, they counted each fish like the crab guys do on “Deadliest Catch.” John records the number so we know this was real—otherwise why 153 instead of 100 or 200?
- The conversation is a bit stilted, even as friendly as the call from the shore had been. They didn’t dare probe him to see if this really was Jesus—I mean, they knew he was.
- And there was Jesus passing out that bread again. He didn’t even have to say, “*This is my body given for you...*” they knew.
- This is probably the 7<sup>th</sup> appearance of Jesus after the resurrection but it is the 3<sup>rd</sup> to his closest disciples.
- Now look at **verse 15** where you probably suspected I have been headed...

**15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?”**

**“Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.”**

**Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”**

**16 Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me?”**

**He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”**

**Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”**

**17 The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”**

**Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”**

**Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. 18 I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” 19 Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!”**

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- Bellies now full, warmed around the fire, tensions reduced and Jesus points out an elephant in the room. He calls Peter by the name he had when he first called Peter to follow him as if he were back to that same original question.
- A month ago, Peter, the man of big actions, had sworn he loved Jesus the most of all the disciples and would die for him, no matter what! In reality even the, more relational John had out-couraged Peter to stand at the foot of the cross and receive Jesus' mother.
- Through the three part interchange John records that Jesus used the "*agapaw*"—word of *agape* love word until the 3<sup>rd</sup> iteration of the question when he switched to the "*philew*" word for love that was the word Peter answered with all three times.
- I don't know for sure if the interchanged was that nuanced. They were speaking Aramaic, John's narrative is now translating into Greek that brings complications—but maybe Jesus was forcing the point.
- He certainly forced Peter to remember vividly his betrayals—his **failures**—of Jesus by asking the same question 3 times around a fire as Peter had denied him 3 times around a different fire.
- Ultimately, John's point is that Jesus is asking Peter to be honest not just with Jesus but with himself. He is asking Peter to "**let come to light**" the reality of his failure—of his sin—to **confess** the truth—to confess it to Jesus, the Lord God himself.
- Each of the 3 times Peter responded that he did love Jesus, What did Jesus say in response? Did he say, "*Peter, see that stick over there? Pick it up and hit yourself as hard as you can with it to show me you are sincere.*" Did he say, "*Peter, see those burning coals from the fire we used to cook and that has kept us warm? Take off your sandals and walk through those red hot coals to suffer as payment for your sin—for your failure.*"

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- I that what he said? Of course not! *"Peter, now that we have the truth out in the open and you are no longer hiding—get up and feed my lambs! Get up and take care of my sheep! Get up and feed my sheep!"*
- In other words, *"Peter, you who didn't think he needed his feet washed back in the upper room, Peter, get back to work on my mission to which I have called you! Peter, your failure—your triple—decker—massive failure of direct sin against me is dealt with. Now, get back to work!"*
- Could it be that simple? Could it be that easy for Peter? Could he really be restored without 40-days of Lent—without making some effort to show his sincerity or pay God back?
- ***The simple answer is, yes!*** And, we dare not forget this especially in times of calamity when some of us are more likely to lean more toward believing in self-flagellation than gracious forgiveness.
- You'll enjoy what follows. Peter's question makes it clear coming to grips with the truth before the Lord God this time was not once and for all, as if he were never to fail God again. No, Peter would need to confess the truth probably many more times in his life ahead. But, I'll keep it shorter and let you go there.
- I will close by reminding you of what John wrote later in his letter we call *1 John*. There, he makes it clear that this theology I have derived from a narrative is not made up.
- Look at **1 John 1: 5-10...**

**<sup>5</sup> This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup> If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. <sup>7</sup> But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.**

**<sup>8</sup> If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup> If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.**

- God doesn't do darkness. God does light. God doesn't hide truth. God exposes truth, says the same John that recorded the three-fold, Petrine exposure we just read.
- So, if we want to *fellowship* (not get saved and go to heaven but share in relationship) with God who does light or exposes truth and reality we can't have things hidden in the darkness of lying even to ourselves. It's a lie to claim we can. It just can't be that we are walking around in fellowship with God but we are hiding reality of failures in darkness.
- BUT, you know here is one of the most wonderful truths of the Christian life in times of crisis or times of calm. If we will but "walk in the light"—that is if we will but let the light of God expose the truth of our failures to Him and to us we will not only be walking around in fellowship with God but we will be walking around with all the rest of us who are willing to walk around in the light—all who are willing to let God expose the truth to them.
- And—here is why that is possible. Because when we agree with God and don't hide from the truth of our failures—our sins—he washes our feet with the power of the precious blood of Jesus to clean us from contaminating sin.
- It is a self-deceiving lie to act as if we don't sin—we don't really fail God. IT doesn't mean we are lost and on the way to hell. It means the reality—the truth of that sin is what is filling us.
- But look, if we will come to a place of honest confession—to a place of agreeing that God's light is showing the truth—if we will stop hiding in darkness where God isn't, God will forgive our failures that break our fellowship with him and wash our feet from the filth we picked up in this world. But we have to agree with God we need our feet washed.

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- If out of darkness we think our sin is hidden or we try to hide it by paying for it with our own self-flagellation so we won't embarrassingly require God to wash our filthy feet—if we do this we are calling God a liar and God's truth isn't our truth at all.
- What does God want us to do about our failure and sin? He wants us to not try to hide it in any dark place.
- He wants us to let his truth revealing light shine on its dirtiness—exposing the reality.
- To put it in terms Peter would easily remember, God wants us to say, ***"You are exactly right God. Your bright light of truth now exposes a sin--a failure! Your light makes it clear my feet are dirty and stinky right now. Please wash them!"***
- Then Jesus will say, *Ok kid! Get up and get back to work!*
- No 40 days of Lent required, Lord Jesus? No, one of the reasons I stayed around for 40 days after the resurrection was so I could walk Peter back into the light and wash his dirty feet again to give you that example.
- *Now, get up, stand on those clean feet and get back to work kid! Stop trying to atone for your failures. I already did that by my blood!*
- *Corona...Corona time or not, the mission is on and you are needed for something more than just beating yourself up over your failures when times are tough!*