

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

Sermon: "Unfinished Business"

Scripture: John 21:1-19

Rev. Steve Filyk

April 19, 2026

Opener: At the dawning of salvation 248

Choruses: O Praise The Name (Anástasis), Jesus is risen 254 vs 1-3

After sermon: My Jesus I Love Thee

After prayers of the people: Lord's Prayer (quartet)

Closer: Come to us, beloved Stranger 262

You know that moment...

you see someone across the room...

and your stomach drops, your heart sinks.

Not because you don't know them.

Not because you don't like them.

But because you have let them down.

You did something that you are ashamed of,

And as you catch their eyes you are confronted by your failure.

PAUSE

Today is the third Sunday after Easter.

We are celebrating the incredible news that Jesus is alive.

He is risen indeed.

Jesus' mission and message have been vindicated.

He has overcome sin, death, and the devil.

The resurrection of Jesus is Good News for all people.

But for one of his closest friends

Jesus' return is complicated.

Peter was a key leader among Jesus disciples.

Along with James and John, he was part of Jesus' inner circle.

Peter was bold.

Peter was brave.

Peter said what the others didn't dare.

When Jesus had told his disciples he was going away,

Peter had pledged to follow him anywhere and everywhere.

"I will lay down my life for you." He boldly announced.

But later that evening when Jesus was arrested and put on trial

And Peter was accused of being an associate of Jesus,

Peter denied it.

Not once under pressure but again

and again.

Peter had failed to stand by Jesus till the end.

And now that Jesus is back, it's complicated.

PAUSE

In today's reading the disciples have returned

To their home base in Galilee.

The other Gospels note how the resurrected Jesus

Promised to meet them there.

It seems that they are waiting for further instructions.

And in the meantime, Peter decides to go fishing.

The disciples who are with him decide to join him.

Remember that for a number of them, this was their trade.

Before Jesus called them they were fishermen.

But despite their familiarity with the work and the lake,

When morning comes around their hands are empty.

You can almost hear the thought creeping in Peter's head:

"I can't even do the one thing I used to be good at."

But into this fatigue and disappointment,

a stranger calls from shore,

Encouraging them to cast to the other side.  
They take up the challenge and suddenly, miraculously  
Their nets are abundantly full,  
too full to drag into the boat.

And then it hits them.  
They realize that person on the shore is Jesus.

Impulsive Peter can't wait for the boat to get to shore  
And jumps in with all his clothing.  
When the disciples arrive, they find breakfast waiting.  
Jesus is cooking a meal, once again provide for them.

We can image there is joy and comfort having Jesus with them.  
The warm food is calm their growling stomachs.

And we can imagine that as the smoke wafts towards Peter  
The smell takes him back  
to another fire... another night...  
when he stood warming his hands,  
And denied his association with Jesus.

It's as if Jesus has recreated the moment—  
not to shame Peter, but to heal what he couldn't forget.

What follows is a conversation between Jesus and Peter.  
I imagine that Jesus has invited Peter to walk the shoreline  
So they can talk and take care of this unfinished business.

Jesus asks Peter three questions.  
The same question repeated each time.  
He doesn't ask: "Why did you fail me?"  
He doesn't ask: "Am I supposed to trust you?"  
Jesus looks at him and asks:  
"Do you love me?"

Actually, the first question is a little more specific:  
Jesus asks him: "Do you love me more than these?"

We don't know what 'these' is being referred to.  
Is Jesus asking whether Peter values him more than  
His former vocation (the fish and nets), or more than Peter's friends  
(the other disciples who were gathered)?

I think Jesus is referring to his earlier boast  
Of laying down his life,  
of being Jesus' most committed disciple,  
Of loving Jesus more than those other disciples loved Jesus.

Jesus asks Peter whether Peter loves him,  
More than James or John.  
Peter, chastened by his experience of his own weakness  
And by the Lord's foreknowledge of his failure,  
Isn't so bold this time.

Peter replies (and I image it is said quietly):  
"Yes Lord.... You know that I love you."

Jesus repeats the question two more times,  
Which for Peter is a painful reminder of the three times  
That he denied Jesus.  
But Jesus is giving him the opportunity  
To undo what Peter regrets and reaffirm his commitment.

But even more powerful than Peter's words  
is what Jesus says next.  
Each time after Peter reaffirms his love  
Jesus call back to service:  
"Feed my lambs... take care of my sheep... feed my sheep."  
This recommission declares Jesus' forgiveness of Peter.  
This recommission asserts Jesus' confidence in Peter's faithfulness.

Jesus leaves no doubt.  
 Peter is not sidelined.  
 He is restored—and sent back into service. [see DA Carson 678]

I don't know if John had Luke's Gospel when he wrote his book,  
 But there are echoes of that earlier call story of Peter  
 As reported in Luke chapter 5,  
 when Jesus commandeered the Peter's boat for a pulpit,  
 And then later led Peter to another miraculous catch,  
 Before calling him to fish for people.

It's come full circle.  
 The same call—but now shaped by failure and grace.

Jesus notes that that Peter's earlier pledge to follow Jesus  
 Wherever he went and to lay down his life for him  
 Will one day be fulfilled.

This humbled and forgiven Peter  
 will be empowered by the Jesus  
 To serve in ways that were only aspirational before.

PAUSE

So what are Jesus' disciples  
 who come two millennia later  
 Supposed to glean from this story.

For those carrying heavy loads of guilt  
 This story reminds us of the grace  
 That the Lord Jesus offers us.

Many of us quietly assume we are disqualified  
 On the basis of the many times  
 we have broken our commitments.  
 We have also disowned our Savior.  
 By what we have done... or haven't done...

While we can't rewrite our past,  
 Jesus invites us to embrace a new future.  
 The question isn't: "Did you fail?"  
 The question is: "Do you love me?"  
 If so, he has work for us to do.

Jesus offers grace to those weighed down by guilt.

But some of us aren't carrying guilt.  
 Some of us are nursing grudges.  
 For those of us bearing bitterness  
 This story reminds us of the grace  
 That the Lord wants us to dispense.

Did you notice how Jesus offers his grace so freely?  
 No guilt-trips. No making people prove themselves. No conditional  
 acceptance.  
 We are called to forgive as we have been forgiven.  
 When forgive others for the sins they have committed against us,  
 We will discover the Lord is healing our wounds  
 And enabling us to serve with joy.

PAUSE

Think back to that moment of dread.  
 When you catch the eyes of someone you've let down, you've failed.  
 In Jesus' kingdom, that moment of dread  
 becomes the place for restoration.

"Do you love me?"  
 Then come.  
 Follow me.