

Text: John 21: 1-19

Title: Offering each other moments of restoration.

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Objectives:

- To consider our perspectives on the possibility of restoration and transformation
 - To explore community/family patterns of shaming and keeping us in our existing patterns
 - To uncover the gentleness of the Risen Christ in meeting us directly, believing in us and entrusting us with the Kingdom
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Introduction

Life often feels like walking in circles.

Going through the routines, reacting to things, being upset by the same people.

And getting frustrated with ourselves.

All the while longing for it to be different.

Albert Einstein said that the definition of insanity is **doing** the same thing over and over and expecting a different outcome. Much like walking in circles.

The last chapter of John, chapter 21, offers us another way.

It is quite mysteriously a second ending to the gospel of John.

And perhaps it is like a second chance.

Especially for Peter.

The Simon Peter, is characterized in John's gospel, as one who passes the same way often.

Walking round and round.

He is seen revisiting similar situations.

For he is once again fishing, he is once again impulsive in his desire to get into the water to be with Jesus, he is once again seated around a charcoal fire being asked three questions.

Each moment in today's story harkens to a path that Peter had walked before.

In a circular movement he is back again.

So today's Gospel invites you and I to think about our perspective on human transformation.

- Is it possible for a person to change, even incrementally?
 - And can we play a part in each other's lives as instruments of restoration and healing?
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John chapter 21, was probably written in retrospect, after the brutal martyrdom of Peter.

And in many ways, it is a perspective on his transformation in community, among his friends and fellow disciples.

As the charcoal fire crackled, I wonder what it was like for him?

I wonder if the memory of Jesus' arrest and trial were circling in his mind.

- His courage to fight the Roman soldier Malchus, chopping off his ear.
- And his complete wimpiness before 3 female servants in the court yard, later that night. "No, I do not know Jesus" he had said not once, not twice but three times.

And now on the beach. He sat in silence. Surrounded by his friends in the company of Christ, remembering the moment when he had let Jesus down.

I wonder if Peter had talked about his shame with any of the others.

I wonder if he sat with an image of himself as shifting sand instead of the Rock "Caiphas" that he was aspiring to be.

And then in public the Risen Christ addresses him, gently and directly.

Let's pause here for just a moment to reflect on our processes in community that often keep us locked in shame.

According to Brene Brown shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of acceptance and belonging.

Just like Peter, shame is triggered when we have a new experience that resonates with an old wound.

Just this past week, I was at UBC and a student said something to me that made me feel disrespected. And inside I go angry. It's like the level of internal heat was turned up.

But the heat didn't go down.

It was like it got inflamed, instead.

Because in that moment, it was not about the student in front of me.

It was about being disrespected by a male teacher as a young girl in a patriarchal South African context

Woundedness comes from people we trust, often people who are the closest to us.

For many the church can be a place of wounding, because we come to this place vulnerable, seeking gentle restoration.

Communities can foster shame.

The most common way we do this is by talking about each other, instead of to each other.

When we talk about each other, we caricature the other, overemphasizing each other's flaws. And it is so easy to get into the routine of doing this.

For it provides a sense of false comfort.

When deep inside we are experiencing the inflammation of another wound.

Shame inducing conversations where we recount the flaws of others are not helpful.

The rut of telling stories about others over and over, at choir practice or coffee hour or Wednesday Bible study, is harmful.

Sometimes we do need another person's perspective on an experience. These are best done one on one, sharing how we are feeling, wrestling with the grittiness of situations, but always with the intent to gain clarity on how to best deal with the situation directly.

We know we are caught in a shame cycle:

- When we find ourselves in circles.
- Patterns of going round and round the same incident:
 - o We may talk about the other person involved over and over again.
 - o We may turn against ourselves and often berate ourselves with negative self-commentary.
 - o We avoid the actual situations that reminds us of our harder moments

Sitting around the charcoal fire.

Peter sits bravely.

And the Risen Christ addresses him gently and directly.

It must have been quite an uncomfortable moment.

It would have been easier to speak about Peter to the other disciples. But he doesn't.

It would have been easier to take the angry parent role and blame Peter for his fear and his three denials. But he doesn't.

Instead, Christ invites Peter to re-affirm their relationship.

Do you love me?

A love that was born both out of friendship and divine wisdom.

Yes, said Peter. You know that I love you.

And then Christ entrusts a community role to Peter. He gives him great responsibility publicly. Feed my sheep. Feed my lambs. I trust you Peter.

Christ trusts us also.
Christ trusts us to offer restoration to each other.
To nurture the possibility of transformation for each other in community.

So, I wonder if instead of walking in circles.
Insanely repeating harmful patterns.

We can think about life as walking a Labyrinth.

A labyrinth is a winding maze that leads from the outer edge toward a centre - round and round and round.

It is circular but it is not a circle.
For when I walk a labyrinth, I come to almost the same place 4 or 5 times on my way to the centre.
Almost the same place, but not quite.
If I am paying attention, I realize that I have actually moved, and with each return I am positioned slightly differently as I am invited to make a different choice and move differently.

Friends, I believe in human transformation.
I am a witness to my own and to others.
And I have companions on my journey that continue to offer me opportunities of restoration along the way.

It is slow. It is intentional.
And it is possible.

No matter how many times we have been drawn into old patterns.
The Risen Christ in and among us, offers us new moments to begin again.

Poet John O Donnehue puts it this way:

In out-of-the-way places of the heart, Where your thoughts never think to wander, This beginning has been quietly forming, Waiting until you were ready to emerge.

For a long time it has watched your desire, Feeling the emptiness growing inside you, Noticing how you willed yourself on,
Still unable to leave what you had outgrown.

It watched you play with the seduction of safety, And the gray promises that sameness whispered, Heard the waves of turmoil rise and relent, Wondered would you always live like this.

Then the delight, when your courage kindled, And out you stepped onto new ground,
Your eyes young again with energy and dream, A path of plenitude opening before you.

Though your destination is not yet clear You can trust the promise of this opening; Unfurl
yourself into the grace of beginning That is at one with your life's desire.

Awaken your spirit to adventure;
Hold nothing back, learn to find ease in risk; Soon you will home in a new rhythm,
For your soul senses the world that awaits you.

May it be so.

Amen