

## December 9, 2012 – Jesus & Peter part III

We've been going through the series in the Gospel of John and we've been putting these pictures up on the wall. Each week we put a silhouette up on the wall that tries to identify the story that we've been talking about. Our goal was, or our idea was, with the silhouettes, because they don't have any features or a face, that you could somehow put yourself in that position, that you could identify with that character in the story because as we watch Jesus interact and deal with other people, we learn how Jesus is going to interact and deal with us and how Jesus treats us and how Jesus sees us. Those lessons are there for us to observe.

I know CFL season is over, but in the States, football is going strong. I heard a story this week about a college football coach. He was quite concerned because his star football player, his quarterback, was right on the brink, he was on the verge of not being able to play because his grades were sinking too low and he was going to be ineligible because of his academics. The coach went to the professor and it was a mathematics professor. He told him "I need this guy in the game and so the professor said "I'll tell you what. I'll ask him one question in front of you and you can watch. If he gets the question right, I'll give him a grade high enough that he can pass and he can play and if he gets it wrong, then I'm going to have to give him a low grade and he won't be able to play." The coach says "Okay, fine. I'll take that deal." And so they bring the football player in and the math professor says "What's 2 plus 2?" The quarterback thinks about it and says "Four". And the coach says "Please give him another chance!"

We all want a second chance, don't we? We all come to a point in our life where we feel like "Maybe if I could just have a second chance on that, another try on that. Maybe I'd do it better. Maybe I'd get it right next time."

I'll be honest with you. There are some sermons, that after I'm done, I feel like "Wow! You know what, can I have a second chance on that? I know there were some good points in my notes somewhere, but the way it came out just wasn't the way I did it, so maybe I could have a second chance." And there are occasionally sermons where I think "Man, I don't ever want to have to do that one again. We'll just put that one away on the shelf, no second chance for that." Sometimes we have experiences like that where we wish, maybe I could get a second chance on that.

My pumpkin-carving season is just over and one of the frustrations when I'm carving pumpkins, especially one like this (picture of pumpkin with Celtic symbol carved on it) is one I did because she likes the Celtic knot work and stuff and I did it because, previous to this one, I did one of those freaky clown ones which she hates and so then I have to compensate by doing one she really likes. I was doing this one and I was 90% through carving it up and doing all this and I cut the wrong piece out. As you know, or you might suspect, when you're doing pumpkins, and you cut something out you can't put it back in. I

remember sitting there thinking “I don’t want to start this all over. Can I have a second chance to make that cut and do it the proper way, this time?”

I’m learning to curl on Wednesday nights, I’m going out and I’m curling. The last time I went out I had a terrible experience. My first eight shots, all eight shots that I was supposed to make, I was supposed to put the rock in front of the house, eight times in a row, just put the rock right there. And on those eight shots, six of them went way, way, way, too far and then the other two went really short. Every time, almost as soon as I let the rock go out of my hand I thought “Oh! Can I just try that again? Maybe I’ll just grab that and pull it back and make a second shot. Maybe I’ll have a second chance or in this chance maybe a 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> chance and maybe put it in the right spot.” Now, fortunately for me, in the end of the game I was playing a different position so I got to do hits instead, and I learned that, that is my gift. I can throw the rock hard and smack things around. If that’s what you need me to do, I’m on target but if you just want me to feather it in somewhere, that’s not quite my forte so far.

How many of you remember the song “The Cat’s in the Cradle”? Remember hearing that song? The guy sings the song and he talks about his kid growing up and it kind of progresses through the kids life and kid of the moral of the song is that, when he gets to the end of his life he kind of wishes that he had a second chance raising his kid because he was always busy and he was doing stuff and he didn’t have time to spend with his son and then when his son got older his son didn’t have time to spend with him. He had some regrets about that.

As I think about second chances, one of the places I often wish I had a second chance, is in raising my kids. I don’t know if you feel that way as well. There are lots of times I feel like, similar to the guy in the song, where I feel like, you know what, I’ve had a really busy week. I’ve had a lot on my plate, I’ve been running around and really all the time I get to spend with my kids is when I come home and I say “Now eat your food! Eat your food! Okay, go put your pyjamas on. Now, go to sleep....go to sleep, no really, go to sleep!” And that’s kind of my interaction with my boys for the night and that’s okay for one night but as those nights start to pile up, I start feeling like, I look back and say “Wow! I wish I had a second chance to do that week to spend some better time with my kids than just going through the routines of life.” Or on days like this morning, we’re in the car and they haven’t figured out the car volume thing with their voice, quite yet. And so they’re really loud in the car and I’m not a morning person so I’m just kind of trying to stay awake and stay conscious as I’m driving the car and they’re loud and they’re playing rock, paper, scissors, in the back seat and it’s really loud and I’m just kind of getting all wound up and frustrated at them. Just really want to let them have it. “Be quiet. Just sit down and be quiet and calm, I’m trying to drive.” Thankfully, this morning didn’t end that way but occasionally it does, almost all the time, I inevitably feel like “You know what? I’d like a second chance at dealing with that situation this morning.” I don’t know if you ever feel

that way or not, if you ever wish you had a second chance on something.

The old saying, I think it was from a Head and Shoulders commercial back in the 80's or something that really coined the phrase "You never get a second chance to make a first impression." Maybe you've had a first impression that you tried to make on someone that didn't quite pan out exactly as well as you wish it had. Maybe that is where you'd like your second chance to come from. Maybe you've been in a job interview and as you're in the interview, as you're in the moment or maybe afterwards, as you reflect back, you think "Oh man! I wish I had a second chance to go through that to answer that question differently or to wear a different outfit or to do something about it a little differently.

Maybe you made investments in something and at the time it looked like a great deal and so you put some money into it and then it didn't really pan out the way you were hoping and so you kind of look back and say "Man, I wish I had a second chance to do that all over again."

Maybe you've been in one of those conversation, I think this is the most popular one actually, been in a conversation where you wish you had a second chance. Maybe you've been in there and you've been discussing something and maybe again, it's usually afterwards and you think "Oh man! I wish I had said...this...during that conversation." You know, the right words didn't come at the time but you always have the right words afterwards. Or maybe, probably even worse, is when you do have the words and you say something exactly the way you want to say it, but that's not necessarily a good thing because when you really, really, nail the person you're talking to it feels good for a moment and then afterwards you're like "I wish I hadn't said that like I did. I wish I had a second chance to go through that."

Maybe you've been in a relationship, a friendship or some other relationship that has not turned out the way you wanted it to. I think we all have this box that we carry with us that has some relationships, some friendships, some dating relationships, whatever it is. Co-worker relationships. Relationships that we carry with us and as we look through the box we go "Oh wow! That didn't turn out the way I wanted it to. And that one didn't end the way I wanted it to. And this one, man I wish I was still connected to that person. And this one, I wish it hadn't ended that way." We kind of have all those relationships that we carry with us and we think "Wow! I wish I had a second chance to relive that moment; to re-write that letter; to re-speak that phone call; to actually make that phone call and talk to that person; and maybe that relationship would have ended differently."

Well, if you've ever been in one of those spots, if you've ever wished that you had an opportunity for a second chance, then you are in luck this morning because our text this morning is all about second chances. Our text this morning is out of John, Chapter 21, the first thing you need to know about John, Chapter 21, is that there is a lot that has happened since the text we looked at last week. Since the text we looked at last week in John, 17, several things have happened. First of all, Jesus has gone to the Garden and has prayed and

he's been arrested; he's been put on trial, if you can call it that it was kind of a sham, but he's been put on trial, technically. He's been sent to the Cross and crucified; after he died, laid in the tomb, he was there three days and then he rose from the grave. And so, all of that has transpired in between last week and this week in our text. We've looked at those texts before, and we will again, but for this time around, we're just going to jump over all of that so you need to have in your mind the context that we're dealing with. So all of that has happened and Jesus has spoken to his disciples and said "I want you to go back up to Galilee and wait there until I come to you." So that's what the disciples do. So they're up in Galilee and they're waiting, and they're waiting, and they're waiting.....and they start to get a little impatient and a little restless sitting around, so here's what happens in John, Chapter 21:

"Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together.

"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.

Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No" they answered. 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. 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. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." 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. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.

This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead."

And this was the Newspaper the next day. "Fishing Banned on the Sea of Galilee" because of over fishing. I imagine if Jesus had stuck around that would be the newspaper that came out. Actually that headline is a modern headline, this Spring, actually in April the Israel Government banned fishing on the Sea of Galilee for about two years because they said the fish population was getting too low. But that was a totally different story, it's not what

happened here. Not because of Jesus going out and doing miraculous catches of fish, it was a totally different story. John mentions at the end of the story, and I think it's a little neat, he mentions that the "nets were full of large fish, so much so but the nets were not torn, and in fact, there were, did you catch the number? How many fish were there? 153. Do you know what the significance of 153 is? John was a fisherman. And so, John when he brought in the net he knew that 153 was a lot of fish and so, since John's a fisherman he kind of writes that into his Gospel and makes a note that: Hey! It's 153 fish, if anyone's worrying that I'm kind of inflating the story, here it is. 153 big ones, were in the net. What I also find interesting, is that John notes that Peter went and got the net and brought the whole thing to Jesus. Which kind of shows you, I think, how amped-up Peter was when this story happened. Because the story says that there's this net of fish, so much so that they could barely bring it into the boat and when they get to shore Jesus says "Get me some fish" and Peter says "Got it." And he runs off and he brings this whole net of fish to Jesus. Now, you've got to wonder why Peter was so wound up, why Peter was so excited, and we'll get into that in a minute.

After the part of the story that we read, there's another section that goes on where Jesus takes Peter aside by himself and three times he asks Peter a question, he asks, "Peter do you love me?" And Peter says "Yeah, of course I love you. You know I love you Jesus." And Jesus says "Well, then, feed my sheep." And he kind of repeats that cycle kind of three times over. Now, you may have heard a lesson or something, some kind of talk about this passage of the scripture and talking about the different kinds of Greek words for 'Love' and how that all plays into that conversation and that might be a good study to have, but this morning, we're going to forget about the Greek words and we're going to go really, really, simple with our message from this story this morning, because I think there is something built into this story that is just so simple that it is profound. So that is what we want to look at this morning. Here's why it's important and we'll come back to why Jesus has this discussion with Peter in just a minute.

When Jesus first appeared to Mary and some of the other women, when he first rose from the grave, in Mark, Chapter 16, Jesus talks to Mary and he says: "Now I want you to go tell the disciples, and Peter, that I have risen." And that's important, because if you remember the story, when Jesus was arrested in the Garden, all of the disciples took off and they fled and disappeared and John and Peter followed Jesus at a distance and went to the courtyard and while Jesus was on trial, Peter was out there and three times someone came up to Peter and said: "Hey! Weren't you with that Jesus guy?" And three times Peter says "No it wasn't me, I don't know the guy. I've never met him." And kind of more and more emphatically he says this three times over and then the rooster crows and he looks at Jesus and he realizes what he has done and he runs out and he weeps bitterly. And that's the last direct interaction we read about Jesus and Peter and so we can infer that when Jesus has risen from the dead that Peter is still feeling very low, very defeated, very heartbroken. So when Jesus tells the women to go back to the disciples he especially mentions Peter, he says:

He says “Go tell the disciples, and Peter, and let them know that I have risen.” And so, that was the message Jesus sent to Peter so that was several days or maybe even a week afterwards, when Jesus comes up to the Sea of Galilee. What Jesus does to impact Peter, to reconnect with Peter, is he essentially re-enacts the story we read earlier out of Luke 5. The story out of Luke 5 is when Jesus first calls Peter and his brother and James and John to be his disciples. And so now that Peter feels like I have failed Jesus, I have been defeated, I have just made a whole mess of this thing, Jesus comes along and essentially re-enacts the whole story and says “Hey Peter! Want a second chance? Want to start all over again? Peter you want to put down your net and come follow me?” And so Peter when he realizes what’s going on, dives into the water and swims to shore and then you have the parallel situation that happens where Jesus asks him three times if he loves him, that kind of matches up with the three denials that occurred earlier. And really, the whole underlying message of that connection between those stories, the message that Jesus wants to convey to Peter, Peter who is feeling just rotten, feeling bad about himself, feeling like a failure, feeling defeated, here’s the message that he wants to give to Peter. Peter, here’s what you need to know. Failure isn’t final. Did you hear that. Failure isn’t final. And in fact, it’s not just Peter who gets that message. If you read your Bible, you cannot go more than a few pages before you find this message repeated to someone. Failure isn’t final.

Think of some of the characters in the Bible. Remember Sampson? Sampson the big strong man who had long hair and he wasn’t supposed to cut it but what did he do? He told his wife and she shaved it off and he lost all his strength. Well, if you continue to read that story, at the end of that story, Sampson redeems himself and renews his relationship with God and is able to destroy the Philistines because failure wasn’t final.

Remember the story of Jonah. Jonah is the guy who was supposed to go to Ninevah but he didn’t want to go. He did everything he could to go the other way and to stop going to Ninevah. He got swallowed by the big fish and was in there for three days and all of that. When he gets spit up on the shore, what does he realize? He realizes, failure isn’t final. He gets up and he goes to Ninevah.

Remember the Israelites who went to the promised land, they were right on the doorstep of the promised land, like across the river, and they sent 12 men in to check it out and when they did, they came back and two of them said, “It’s a wonderful place. Let’s go get it. God is on our side.” Ten of them said “Wow! Those guys are big.” So the Israelites decided, Yeah! I don’t think we can do this. And because of that, they don’t go into the promised land, they wandered around in the desert for 40 years, BUT, at the end of that 40 years, Joshua brought them back to the City of Jericho and after they walked around and did what God said, the City fell without a single battering ram or anything, the walls just fell, because God was telling them, “Failure isn’t final.”

Remember the story of David who at one point was considered a great, great, King. But then he had some indiscretions with Bathsheba and went WAY, way off course with her.

Had an affair with her and had her husband killed and all of that. But in the end, God redeemed him and said “You know what, David. You’re going to have a son and it’s going to be Solomon and he’s going to be the wisest man on the face of the Earth and he’s going to lead the Country of Israel, because, you’re failure isn’t final.

You think of the story in Luke 15 of the prodigal son, the son who goes off and blows his inheritance in wild living and once it’s all gone and there’s a famine in the land and he’s desperate and he’s sitting there feeding the pigs, he decides “You know what? I need to go home and beg my father’s forgiveness. While he is a long way off the father sees him and he runs out and he welcomes him and he puts a robe on and a ring and sandals and the whole works, and has a celebration. Why? Because his failure was not final.

The stories go on and on...you think of Saul, persecuting the Church. Right? If anything is going to be a final failure, it’s got to be that, right? No! God redeems him, Paul becomes a great apostle. His failure isn’t final.

And here in the Gospel of John, Peter is just one more example. Peter! You’ve got to love Peter. Peter’s the guy who tried to walk on water, but, fell in. He was the guy, who when Jesus was washing feet he said “You’re not touching my feet, Jesus.” and Jesus said “Well if I don’t wash your feet you can’t have any part of me.” And he says “Okay. Let’s do the whole bath then.” And Jesus says “No. That’s not right either, Peter, right?” Peter’s the guy who, in the Garden, when they came to arrest Jesus he pulled his sword and started hacking off ears and Jesus said “No Peter! Put the sword away. That’s not right.” Peter the guy who denied Jesus three times in the courtyard, even once to a little girl. And Jesus says “Peter, you know what? Your failure is not final.

Now there are still consequences to our failure, sure. There are still consequences that come that we’re going to have to deal with. That we’re going to have to work through. There are hurts that are going to have to be healed that are caused by some of our failures. There are amends that we are going to need to make to address the failures that we’ve had and the mistakes we’ve made in our past. But even beyond all of those things, those things exist, but our failure itself is not final. It is not the last word.

Now, I want you to think of the significance of that message to John’s First Century readers. Do you remember who John’s original readers were? I know it’s been many weeks since we discussed this so search way back in the memory. John was writing to early Christians who were being forced to make a choice. He was writing to Jewish Christians who were being told by the Jewish community that they were going to have to decide if they were going to be a true Jew or if they were going to be one of these Christians??? And if you decide to be a Christian, that’s it! We’re kicking you out of everything that has to do with Judaism, we’re going to ostracise you socially, we’re going to boycott your business. We’re going to tell everyone “Don’t shop at his place because he’s one of those Christian guys.”

That's the choice that people were being forced to make. John was telling his readers "That choice is coming and I want you to choose Jesus because Jesus is the superior choice. Jesus is going to provide you with a superior life. Jesus is the One that God has truly sent to be Lord of your life and they were faced with that choice and that decision. Not far off is this persecution that's going to come from Rome and it's going to put people in jail and it's going to torture people and it's going to kill people who will not renounce their faith in Christ. So that's the audience that John is writing his Gospel to, and he said "Here is what I want you to do. Here is what's most important. I want you to "Believe", and that's the underlying message of his entire Gospel. I want you to believe, to believe in Jesus but not just a belief that's a head-knowledge. Not just a belief that's kind of, an accumulation of information. What I want you to do is, I want you to believe in a way that is a conviction that compels corresponding action. I want you to believe in a way that it changes what you do and what you say and what you think. That's the kind of belief that I want you to have. All through John's Gospel, all of these silhouettes up on the wall, they are examples of people who did one of two things. The either believed: Or they didn't.

We have stories of people who believed, like the woman at the well ran back into town and got the whole town to come out to see Jesus.

We have stories of people who believed like the blind man in John, chapter 9, a man blind from birth who Jesus healed and he goes around and he stands up to even the Pharisees and his parents and he says "You know what? This guy is the real deal."

And then we have people like Nicodemus who comes to Jesus in the night and he talks to Jesus and we're not really sure what Nicodemus is going to do with that. He doesn't really jump on board and maybe he does down the road, but we're not really sure if he's really going to believe or not.

And then we have people like the man in John, Chapter 5, the lame man, the man who wanted to get into the pool and Jesus heals him. You remember how that story ends? Jesus finds him later in the Temple and from what Jesus says to the man it's clear that at least, at that point, he hasn't gotten things straightened out. Jesus says "You know what? Stop sinning or something worse is going to happen to you."

And so, all through John's Gospels we have these examples of people who believe in Jesus, sometime at great cost to themselves, and other people who do not believe in Jesus. And so, John is the only one who includes this story of this miraculous catch of fish at the end of his Gospel. He's the only one who records that for us and it seems to me that his message is: You know what, for all of those of you who have believed, great, keep on believing. But if you're one of those people who has been reading this story and while you've been reading this story you think "Wow! These people who have believed are great. These people who have stood up for their faith are great. These people who have been bold and



courageous are wonderful, but that's not me, that hasn't been me. I've been Nicodemus, playing both sides of the fence. I've been that lame man who just kept on what he was doing after he encountered Jesus. If you are that person, here's what you need to know. Your failure is not final. It's not too late. There is still time for you to believe. There is still time for you to follow Jesus.

So, that was his message 2000 years ago. What do you and I take home from this story this morning. Well here are some of the things that jump out at me:

First of all, if you have been that person, if you have been the one who has said "No" to Jesus, and maybe that's been once and maybe that's been many times. But if you have said no to Jesus and if you've decided "You know what, that Jesus, it's not for me. That faith thing and God that just doesn't really fit in my life. If that has been your past journey, it's not too late. If that has been where you're coming from the good news is, you can still change your mind, you can still turn toward God and you can still say "You know what? From now on, I'm going to believe. From now on my faith is going to control my actions.

But perhaps you've been one of those persons who has believed without really buying in. One of those people who has chosen ritual over relationship and so you do the right things and you come to Church on Sunday and you kind of do all the churchy things that you're supposed to do and you kind of live within the guidelines more or less but that's been the extent of your connection with God, you haven't really personalized it, you haven't had that really kind of intimate relationship with Jesus that isn't just about following a certain checklist of things that it's something that's inside of you, it's kind of who you are and it kind of dictates everything you do. If that's been your experience, then you know what? Praise God that you've had that experience thus far...but...there's still time to go deeper. There's still opportunity to go beyond that. There's still time to live a life of faith and belief like John is talking about. A faith that totally controls and dictates everything we say and do and think. And there is an opportunity for that, for you, today.

Perhaps you've had that experience, of you know what? I am a believer and my faith is at the very centre of who I am, it's at the core of my being and I try to make everything I do revolve around my faith in Jesus, I try and be conscious about God in my daily life and the things I do, well then, maybe the challenge for you this morning, is you know what? Maybe I can develop my prayer life a little more. Or maybe I need to spend more time in reading or fasting or praying. Or maybe, you know what, I've had that at my core but I was wondering, maybe there's some service that I really need to get into. Some hands on ministry that I could do. Or you know what? Maybe God is calling me to be more of a leader in my family or in my neighbourhood or in this Church and so maybe that's what God is calling me to do. I haven't done it yet, but the good news is, there is still time, it's not final, there is still some place for you to go, some place for you to grow.

Now, I realize, and I will be the first to admit. When it comes, the idea of giving God's grace to other people, like it's been given to us. I like that, I like that statement, I like that concept but...whoever said 'it's better to give than receive' that may be true, but it's a lot easier to receive than to give. And especially, especially when it comes to second chances. Maybe I'm the only one who is like this but...second chances...I love 'em, when I get them, I'm a little more hesitant to give them out. Especially in some situations, I'm a little reluctant to just hand out second chances freely and so, that is a challenge for us. I can't tell you this morning but you need to decide that no matter who it is you're going to give them a second chance. No matter what happens to you, you'll promise yourself "You'll get a second chance." I think that's what God wants us to do, but I'm guessing most of us aren't quite ready to do that yet. So, here's what I'm going to challenge you to do instead. I'm going to challenge you to ask yourself "How would our families be different if we were more willing to give second chances? If I was more willing to give a second chance to my wife or my kids. Yes! My kids still have rules, and my kids still have consequences for not following the rules, but what if I was more willing to hand out a second chance in my family? What if I was more willing to hand out second chances at our work places? What if you were willing to hand out second chances to your boss? Or to your annoying co-worker in the next cubicle over? What if you were more willing to hand out second chances to the people at your office or wherever it is that you work? What if you were more willing to offer second chances to give the grace that God's given you, to other people in your neighbourhood, when your neighbour cuts down your tree that's over his fence. Or when your neighbour shovels his snow onto your driveway. Or when your neighbour does whatever else it is that your neighbour does that rubs you the wrong way and drives you nuts. Or he plays his music too loud, or whatever it is. What if you were just a little bit more willing to say: "You know what? Because of what God has done for me, you get a second chance." Imagine if people in our city saw this Church, not as I often describe it 'The one next to Leon's'. I wish I had something better to describe us. What if we were not defined or recognized or not identified by our worship style. What if we were not identified by our programs or our activities or the different things we do? What if we were known in the city of Saskatoon and someone said "Hey, have you heard of that Saskatoon Church of Christ place?" And everyone who heard that question would answer "Yeah! I know them, they're the Church of second chances." Can you imagine what a difference that would make to our group? Could you imagine what a difference that would make in our City? That's a big challenge. That's a big goal for us to set but I think it is one that is a worthy goal. I think it is one that God would have us aspire to and I think it's one that the Apostle Peter would say "Man, I feel at home there because I've needed a lot of second chances" and not just Peter but me, and I'm guessing you, as well.