

The Lord's Message: What Do I Do Now?

Date: May 1, 2022

Where: Tilghman UMC

Scripture Reference: John 21:1-19

Last Sunday, we came to the conclusion that all of us, from one time or another, have doubts. We also concluded that our doubts are not a hinderance to our faith. Instead, our doubts cause us to dig deeper into our faith and draw us closer to God. This week, we are going to look at something that is detrimental to faith and that is shame. This shame is not something that God puts on us. There has been this perception that God wants us to feel shameful, for Paul writes in **Romans 3:23**, that all of us are sinful. God does not want us to live in shame and guilt, but in His grace.

Let us pray.

John could have ended his book with chapter 20. As a matter of fact, this appears to be the ending, **John 20:30-31**. Many theologians have reasoned that chapter 21 was written by someone else. One could make that case. I tend to believe that everything in the Bible is there for us. This is what Paul tells Timothy in **2 Timothy 3:16-17**.

As chapter 20 dealt with the doubts of all the believers to the news that Jesus is alive, chapter 21 deals with the guilt that all the believers felt. Their joy at seeing Jesus alive, now turns to shame and guilt. They were all guilty of not standing up for Jesus. All the disciples fled on Maundy Thursday when Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. Only John was at the cross on which Jesus was crucified. All the other disciples were gathered in the locked room. The leader of this group, Peter, had denied knowing Jesus three times. Now that Jesus is alive, they all are filled with shame and guilt. The wonderful times that they had with Jesus. The miracles that they had been eyewitness to. The teachings of God that they had been privileged to hear. Surely, Jesus would not have anything to do with them after they had let Jesus down. In **John 20:23**, Jesus' words about "If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive anyone's sins, they are not forgiven," rang in their ears and their hearts. The sins that they are having a problem forgiving are their own. Even after seeing Jesus twice in 8 days in the locked room, they are still burdened with the shame and guilt of not standing up for Christ.

They must have said to each other, "What do I do now?" The Bible tells us this in **John 21:1-3**, that Peter said, "I'm going fishing." Six of the 11 disciples joined Peter. They went back to the Sea of Galilee. They fished all night and caught nothing. There is a difference between fishing and catching.

They were not alone. We are never alone. God is always with us, **Deuteronomy 31:8**. In verse 4, Jesus was standing on the shore, but the disciples did not recognize Him. The reason for them not recognizing Jesus could be that it was dark and they were a long way off. We do not know the real reason.

In verse 5, Jesus hollers out to them, "Have you caught any fish?" They replied, "No." Jesus then tells them in verse 6 to throw their nets on the right side of the boat. At once, they had a huge catch of fish. So many fish, they thought that the net was going to break.

Hold on, did this not happen once before? Look at **Luke 5:1-11**. In Luke, the fishermen have been out all night catching nothing. Jesus comes to the shore to teach the people about the kingdom of God. The fishermen are on the shore cleaning and drying their nets. The crowd grows. Jesus asked Peter to use his boat. Peter obliges. Jesus sits in the boat and Peter positions the boat some ways from shore, so that Jesus can address the growing crowd. After Jesus finished teaching, Jesus instructs Peter to take the boat into deeper water to catch fish. Peter probably thinking what does Jesus knowing about fishing. Peter tells Jesus that they have been fishing all night and caught nothing, but because you want us, we will give it a try. As soon as the nets are cast into the water, there is huge a catch of fish. At the end of this event, Jesus tells them that they are to leave their nets, follow Him, and they will catch more than fish, they will catch people. Jesus is calling them to ministry.

Almost the same event plays out here. Jesus is calling them to ministry. Do not be concerned about not standing up for Jesus at His arrest, trial, and crucifixion. That was all part of God's plan. Jesus has forgiven them. In **John 21: 12-13**, Jesus is calling them back to fellowship with Him. Jesus is calling them back to ministry.

There was still someone that had a hard time forgiving **himself**. That person is Peter. Peter has said to Jesus in **John 13:37** that he would lay down his life for Jesus. Jesus tells him in **John 13:38** that he will deny knowing Jesus three times before the rooster crows. In **Matthew 26: 69-74**, we have the account of Peter denying Jesus three times.

Now, Peter is still feeling the guilt and shame of what he has done, **John 21: 15-19**. Jesus knows this. He never doubted Peter's commitment to love and follow Him. Peter was the one that doubted and felt the shame and guilt, not Jesus. Jesus wanted to set Peter free from his shame and guilt. If God has forgiven us, why do we continue to carry the burden of shame and guilt? We need to lay it at the foot of the cross or the altar and not pick it back up. After Peter responds in the affirmative, Jesus tells Peter the works that Peter is going to do for Him.

Jesus is recommissioning all the disciples. Jesus is moving them past their shame and guilt. Jesus is telling them that I have forgiven you. You need to forgive yourself. My grace covers all your sins. So, go and follow me.

The same idea which was true for the disciples is true for us today. It does not matter what we have done. If we have repented of our sin, then we do not need to hold onto the shame and guilt any longer. We are free. God tells Isaiah in **Isaiah 1:18**. Further evidence is found in **Psalms 103:10-12**, that God forgets our sin.

What do I do now? If God has forgiven us, then we need to forgive ourselves. Shame and guilt are detrimental to our faith. The Good News of Easter is that God wants us to be free and not burdened by shame and guilt. Jesus paid the price for our sin. We have been redeemed. Jesus is calling us to follow Him. We cannot do this if we are burdened by our shame and guilt. Let us leave our shame and guilt at the altar and follow Him. Amen.