

“No, no, no”, he said.

Not one, not twice but three times. Three times he broke his promise; three times he betrayed his vow; three times he denied his love.

“No, no, no”, and he ran for his life, from the shadow of death; and choked on his guilt for days after.

It's one thing to turn on your neighbor, make a promise and break it, think you know exactly the path you are suppose to follow and then halfway through discover, you've made a mistake; but denying God cuts pretty deep.

My gosh, Peter, was his right hand man. He was the one asking all the questions because he wanted to understand. He was the one who refused to let Jesus wash his feet at first, he was the one that swore up and down he'd never deny him, but in the face of martyrdom, at the risk of crucifixion, his fear got the best of him.

I am not sure I would have been any better.

Many years ago there was a show I loved, *Quantum Leap*, and if you haven't figure it out yet, you'll note once again my propensity for science fiction.

The lead character, Sam, would go back in time and “make right what once went wrong.” The cool thing was that he actually embodied the person, so it still looked like them on the outside but it was Sam on the inside. He would fix the mistakes and when he had accomplished it, he would leap into the next lifetime and the original soul would be replaced.

He had no control over this. He never knew where he was going, hardly ever remembered where he had been. All he knew was that he had a reason for being there – “to make right what once went wrong”, and when he figured out what that was and fulfilled it, he would leap.

If a feud had separated a family, he repaired it.

If a storm was about to take a life, he saved it.

And in what was one of the most meaningful of all the stories, he went back to his own childhood, and was given a chance to make it right with his own dad.

Sam gave everybody a second chance at their life.

It seems to me in some ways that is what Jesus is doing; not leaping into someone else, though I imagine that is what conversion must feel like. But putting right what went wrong by reminding Peter of his call. You see they have all returned to being fisherman; a very human thing to do. Whenever we are faced with loss, grief, stress, we revert to what we know. We return to our comfort zones and fall into the ways of life we have known before. There is solace in what we know a shielding from the unknown chaos of the future. So that is what the disciples do.

They have just had this unbelievable, life changing, transformational experience - a roller coaster ride from the highest of the high to the lowest of the low. They have walked with the son of God, and in the end, they'd blown it.

They just tucked their tails between their legs and ran. They knew he had risen. He'd come to the Upper Room. But now what? What do they do with their lives now? They have waited for another appearance and further directions, until finally when they can't stand it anymore. When their anxiety becomes unbearable, they have to take action. And Peter finally says, "I'm going fishing." I'm returning to the familiar. I'm returning to what I know. I need to forget. And all the disciples say, "me too"

And that's where Jesus meets them – back at the beginning, where it all started.

Just before daybreak – you remember that time – that threshold, sacred place, not quite day, not quite night; that in-between the world's time

He comes.

He looks out and sees them as he saw them before, fishing but not catching.

"Fish on the other side", he yells out to them. And just as before, there is abundance. The disciples have an "Ah ha" moment and they remember! And Peter, who, no doubt, has been mercilessly beating himself up, replaying the scenes in his mind, "if only, if only... ", is so happy to see him he jumps out of the boat and swims to shore. And what does he find? The table - The Christian symbol of hospitality.

Jesus is preparing breakfast for them and has fish and bread, just like when he fed the 5000. And again he asks them to give a portion of what they have to him and to each other. When all have given and all received, then all are fed. That is the life of community. Giving and receiving at Christ's table.

And then he turns and calls Peter once more. This is the moment of forgiveness and assurance, the one who denied him is called again, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Not once, not twice, but three times. Three times he promises, three times he repairs his vow, three times he pledges his love. Jesus gives Peter a second chance.

Before he was just a fisherman, naïve, confused, following but not understanding, loving but not loving. Do you love me? Are you now ready? Are you now willing? Will you choose me over the lure of comfort, over the security of the familiar? Will you choose the unknown future or the familiar past? Do you love me enough? It is what one might call an educated decision this time. Before he followed unknowing, will he follow now – knowing?.

Yes, Lord, Peter says – you know, you know, you know I do. Then Feed my sheep and Follow me.

They have come full circle, back where it all began – the call, the fish, the bread, the abundance, it is all here again. The table, the call, the commission; Jesus repeats in beautiful symbolic movements. The meaning of our lives - to follow and to feed others, to love as we have been loved.

But what are we to feed the sheep?

Jesus sets the example. Let's see, Jesus served – forgiveness, compassion, encouragement, welcome, understanding - with an abundance of second servings.

Second chances.