



CHRISTIAN CRUSADERS

7401 UNIVERSITY AVE., CEDAR FALLS, IOWA 50613

(319) 277-0924

INFO@CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

WWW.CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

An Encouraging Word for Foul-Ups

May 1, 2022

Rev. Steve Kramer

TEXT: John 21:1-19 (ESV)

After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.

When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go."

(This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me."

Have you ever fouled up in a big way? Well, we're not alone on that. Let me tell you the story of a man named Roy Riegels. Actually, he picked up the nickname. Wrong Way Riegels after a major foul up in his life. On New Year's Day 1929, Georgia Tech played the UCLA Bruins¹ in the Rose Bowl. In that game, a young man named Roy Riegels recovered a fumble for UCLA, picking up the loose ball, though he lost his direction, and ran 65 yards toward the wrong goal line. One of his teammates, Benny Lam, ran him down, tackled him just before he scored for the opposing team. Several plays later, the Bruins had to punt. Tech blocked the kick and scored a safety, totally demoralizing the UCLA team. This strange play came later in the first half, and at halftime the UCLA players filed off the field, and went into the dressing room. As other players sat down on the benches and the floor, Riegels put a blanket around his shoulders and sat in a corner away from the others and put his face in his hands. He was distraught. Now a football coach usually has a great deal to say to his team during halftime, but that day, well, Coach Price was quiet. No doubt he was trying to decide what to do with Riegels.

We have a scene somewhat like that in this story from John's gospel that we've read. The lives of Jesus disciples, you see, were kind of put on hold at this point in time. They weren't sure of what was coming next. We find that they've gone back to Galilee. They had already had an encounter with the risen Jesus in the upper room back in Jerusalem, but now some time had passed and they were waiting, wondering what's going to happen next. We can't know what was going on in their minds, but their heads had to have been spinning after the events of the cross and resurrection. Fear and joy were probably intermingled during those post resurrection days in the minds of those men. Well, even perhaps, for example, Simon Peter – what was he thinking? He had to have been thinking to himself, "I have really fouled up as a disciple. I let Jesus down. He's probably had it with me. He hasn't said anything to me about it yet. But maybe it's time to go back to fishing for fish instead of people."

And so, he said one day to the others with him, "I am going fishing." So Simon Peter and six others got in a boat and they went out fishing. They fished all night, caught nothing. They were skunked. At dawn before the sun had not yet begun to rise, they

¹ Editor's note: Riegels played for the University of California Golden Bears, who competed against Georgia Tech in the 1929 Rose Bowl.

tiredly pointed their boat back to shore, when suddenly, suddenly they heard a voice through the foggy mist. "You boys catch any fish?" They said, with voices tinged with disappointment, "No." They didn't know who it was that was asking them the question. They couldn't make out who it was through the early morning fog and mist on the water. Then the voice spoke again: "Throw out your net on the right side and you'll find some fish." So, they cast their net out on the right side of the boat and suddenly the net was so full of fish they couldn't drag it in. The boat sagged under the weight of the fish. John, one of the disciples, exclaimed, "It's the Lord!" Peter got so excited by John's statement. He jumped in the water and swam towards Jesus. He was 100 yards out from shore when he began to swim. The other disciples were probably yelling at him as they tried to get the net in – "Hey, Peter, get back here, you lazy bugger." But Peter was a man with a mission. He swam as hard as he could. He wanted to get to Jesus for some reason. When he hit the shallows, he stood up, tired, dripping wet, and he hurried over to Jesus. He wondered, I suppose, in his mind: what would Jesus say to him? Would he chew him out? Peter just stood there, staring into the eyes of his master. The disciples came in shortly after Peter dragging all the fish in the net. They all smelled fish that were frying on a charcoal fire nearby that Jesus had prepared. And he said, "Bring some of the fish you've caught and throw them on the fire with mine."

Peter quickly jumped up, carried out the Lord's instructions like he was just aiming to please. "Now, come and have breakfast." Jesus said. Peter and the other sat down around the fire warming themselves, and Jesus served them bread and fish. They were all very quiet, not sure what to say as they were eating, stealing glances at Jesus, sitting with them. But when they had finished eating, it was Jesus who broke the silence. "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" His arms were pointing towards the other disciples. Jesus, you see, was poking a sore spot, a memory. Remember, Peter boasted in the upper room before Jesus was arrested. "The others may fall away. But I won't," Peter had said. "Yeah, Lord, you know I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Jesus asked him a second time the same question, and Peter said, "Yes, Lord, I love you." Jesus said, "Tend my sheep." Then the third time, a few moments later, "Peter, do you love me?" Peter by this time was getting a bit exasperated and perhaps a little embarrassed. And he said, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you." And Jesus looked at him and said, "Feed my sheep."

Now why the redundancy on the part of Jesus? I mean, three times he asked Peter the question, “Do you love me?” Was he trying to humiliate and embarrass the man in front of his peers? I don't think so. By the third time, I can't help but wonder that as Peter turned his eyes to avoid the Lord's gaze and glanced at the fire, that charcoal fire, and he smelled the burning coals, did it stir a memory of a dark Thursday night not long ago when he warmed himself by a charcoal fire outside the High Priest's house while Jesus was being tried? And Peter denied knowing Jesus three times before others. Did Peter perhaps raise his eyebrows at this point and look knowingly, even gratefully at Jesus? We don't know if he did.

But we do know what is going on here, don't we? Peter's being reinstated. This poignant scene ends with Jesus going on to outline his plan for Peter's future. It was positive, but also painful. Peter would faithfully serve Jesus in the future and even die on a cross like Jesus. We have before us a grace moment on the on that seashore, a lovely picture of the risen savior offering forgiveness to Peter, to this major foul-up. It's a redemptive story, you see, in which we see Peter being restored. What Jesus was saying to Peter in this conversation with his three questions was “All is forgiven, Peter. Tend my sheep, feed my sheep. Yes, you did let me down when the pressure was on. But I forgive you. You're still on my team. I still have plans to use you, so follow me.”

The forgiveness that Jesus offers, Peter – and us – is not to be taken lightly. As you know, it came at a great cost – the cross – where Jesus paid for our sins. That we might be rescued and forgiven. Now as a disciple of Jesus, I find this narrative encouraging and inspirational. There's hope for Christ-followers like us who are prone to foul up in our service to Jesus. And let's admit it, folks: we all tend to let him down in a variety of ways, and we do it regularly. We let him down by denying him in front of others with our actions and words instead of standing up for him. We let him down by disobeying him and refusing to show love towards others, thus representing Jesus poorly, instead of letting our light shine in his name so that others might turn in faith and give God glory. We let him down with our moral lapses when we give in to enticing temptations. We fail him when we forget that we're always on call for him to serve and witness in his name, and opportunities come and go and they slip by. And we let him down when we fearfully hold our tongues when the doors open up for us during conversations to speak of him and what he's done for the world. Oh, friends, how I've let him down myself, again and again. I all too often fail him. And I'm then left guiltily wondering, “What's to become of me? I am such a weak and poor disciple. Jesus has every reason to

just write me off." Perhaps you've had those moments, too. But foul-ups like that don't have to be the last word, we're told.

First, let's get back to that opening story about "Wrong Way" Riegels, sitting dejectedly in that quiet locker room, and the coach wondering what to do with him. When the time keeper came into the locker room and announced that there were 3 minutes before playing time, Coach Price looked at the team and said, "Men, the same team that played the first half will start the second." The players got up and started out. All but Riegels – he didn't budge. The coach looked back and called to him. Riegels didn't move. Coach Price went over to where he sat and said, "Roy, didn't you hear me? The same team that played first half starts the second." Riegels looked up, his cheeks wet, "Coach," he said, "I can't do it. I've ruined you. I've ruined the university's reputation. I've ruined and embarrassed myself. I can't face the crowd out there." Coach Price reached out, put his hand on Riegels' shoulder and said, "Roy, get up. Go on back there. The game is only half over." Well, Riegels finally did get up and went back onto the field and the fans saw him play hard and play well. Riegels had a good and merciful coach, wouldn't you say?

Peter got back in the game as well, by the way. He became a powerful instrument in God's hands for the cause of Christ, as the Book of Acts tells us. He still had his foul ups, big time foul ups, but Jesus would forgive him and set him straight and use him for the cause of his kingdom. The fact is, Peter had a great and merciful Savior and Lord Coach forgiving him, urging him on. Truth is, so do we. So do we. All of us foul up along the way. We just will. But we see in today's story that failure doesn't have to be the final word. We have a great Lord and Savior telling us: "The game is only half over. I forgive you. I can still use you for my redemptive purposes. Let's get back out on the field. The harvest is white and just waiting for the gospel." Amen.

Let's pray, Lord, we say that we love you, but again and again, as you know, we let you down – with our silence about knowing you when we're with others, with our moral failures, and our unwillingness to love others as you've loved us. We are sorry. Forgive us. Renew us and lead us so that we may faithfully walk in your ways and bring honor and glory to your holy name. And on this day, we thank you for the assurance of the forgiveness that is ours through the cross. For the good news that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Amen.