

## “Hauled Back In”

A reflection for the Third Sunday of Easter  
by Greg Smith-Young (Elora-Bethany Pastoral Charge)

John 21:4-19

May 1, 2022

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Among all of Jesus' disciples, who was the greatest? The Rock! The one with the biggest churches. The one most pope-ular. Peter! You'd think.

Think again!

Oh, he has his moments. He always starts off so, so well. But by the end, he's finished.

Like when they first meet. Astonished at what he has just seen Jesus do, and scared at who this Jesus might be, Peter collapses. *“Get away from me, Master! I'm a sinner!”* As if Jesus doesn't already know. He pulls Peter up, and brings him along.

Did Jesus really know how much a sinner Peter would turn out to be?

Another time, again on the water. Jesus has sent them all across in their boat. That night, in the midst of a storm, Jesus comes to them, walking across the waves. *“If it is really you, Master, then call me over!”* That's Peter. It's what he does. Speaks, then thinks, then sinks. Jesus says, *“Come.”* Peter sets out, stepping from splash to splash. Then he takes his eyes off Jesus, and goes under. Jesus has to pull him up and haul him in.

Would Peter ever get it right?

Another time, Jesus asks them who they think he is. Yes, Peter speaks first. And he gets it. Jesus is the Messiah, God's king, saving the people and establishing God's Kingdom. *Gold star, Peter!* Then Jesus starts laying out what that means for the Messiah: suffering, dying. *“It's not true,”* blurts out Peter. *“That can't happen to you.”* *“You Satan!”* is Jesus' reply. Harsh! Right! Brownie points Peter has become Jesus' tempter. *“I need you behind me”* says Jesus.

Will Peter have Jesus back?

He's got bundles of bravado. *“I'll fight for you until the end!”* He does . . . for a moment, right? But so very wrong. When the arrest squad comes to get Jesus, Peter swings a sword and sheds blood. It's like he's never gotten Jesus. As if that can be our way. Before he opens his mouth, Peter has already denied Jesus.

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This is a spoken word poem by Paul Faulkner. It's called “Pete.”

*Let me tell you about Peter*

*The night before Jesus died,  
a group of girls and guys  
gathered under a Jerusalem sky  
to try to summarize  
the events of the previous day.*

*See, Jesus had just been taken away,  
and while most had fled, Peter decided to stay  
trying find a way to enter the fray  
to save his Saviour from this Roman power play.*

*But as he sits down by the fire to warm his hands and feet,  
a person starts staring and then begins to speak*

*"Hey, isn't he one of them?  
One of those weirdos causing havoc in Jerusalem!"*

*All of a sudden, Peter's got a dilemma.  
How does he escape this malicious agenda?*

*He does the obvious thing.  
His fingers start fidgeting  
and the rocks on the ground become particularly interesting,  
as he says, "No, I don't know that guy. I'm just here for the fishing."*

*It's not the best lie,  
but interest seems to die,  
and the group moves on.  
That is, until someone else comes along.  
"Weren't you with those guys before?"*

*"Nope, you must have me confused.  
I'm just a regular, everyday, ordinary Jew.  
And if I'm honest, I'm kind of tired of being accused.  
So if you'll excuse me, I'm gonna sit somewhere else."*

*But before Peter could feel too pleased with himself,  
a third person came along with serious intent.  
"You were definitely with him. 100%.  
You've got the same accent.  
Who else could you be?"  
So Pete gets mad, says, "Now listen to me!"*

*I've never even heard of Galilee.  
And so the reality is, you're the suspicious one, not me!"*

*Suddenly, Pete remembers the prophecy  
that he would deny Jesus 3 times.  
In what was quite possibly  
the worst moment of his life.*

*But hey, don't worry. There's a bit more to come.  
Three days after he dies, God's only begotten son  
defeats death, and shows the world He's the one  
they've been waiting for.<sup>1</sup>*

III

Okay. Jesus is back! Great.

But what about Peter, and his big mistake? The one with so much at stake. Three times he denied Jesus. Nor will it be the last that he will make.

Had Jesus known that Peter would not stay behind him. Peter would not get it right. Peter is a sinner. He told Jesus as much, that first time they met. Jesus should have got away from Peter, right there and then. Then their beginning would have been their end. Instead, their end together seems to be now. Yes, Jesus is far from finished.

Peter though? Jesus will not stay away from him.

[Please read John 21:1-19](#)

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<sup>1</sup> We showed the video in worship, which you can see here: It's distributed by Go Chatter Media Ltd (Coventry, United Kingdom) [gochattervideos.com](http://gochattervideos.com). We purchased it and used it with permission.

IV

[The end of Paul Faulkner's poem]

*But when Pete joins him by the fire,  
he's not really sure if he's going to be accepted.  
Yes, Jesus is forgiving but Pete feels disconnected,  
and so as he approached probably expected  
some kind of divine retribution.*

*Instead, he received a divine resolution  
as the pollution between the two  
was burned away.*

*And that same story plays out today  
as millions seek to find a way back to Christ after going astray  
imagining there's no way  
to close the space  
when all He wants to do is show you His grace,  
to invite you to take a seat,  
to warm your cold feet,  
and to be restored in love just like He did with Pete.*

V

The song that Phil sang, "Good God Almighty," it starts with this.

*I can't count the times I've called Your name some broken night  
And You showed up and patched me up like You do every time  
I get amnesia, I forget that You keep coming around  
Yeah, ain't no way You'll ever let me down (me down)<sup>2</sup>*

Could that have been Pete's prayer?

I'm not sure. I wonder if even after Jesus resurrected, Peter ever dared hope that he was beyond hopeless? Had he finally failed too far, for even Jesus? How many times could he let the Lord down? So many times . . . yet never too many for Jesus. That's true for Peter. True for you. Jesus never let Peter down. He kept on hauling him back in. You too.

So, did Peter get away with it?

No. Jesus did not let Peter get away. He called this fisherman to keep following him,

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<sup>2</sup> By Ben Glover, David Crowder, and Jeff Sojka. © 2021 gt One Songs. For use solely with the SongSelect® Terms of Use. All rights reserved. [www.ccli.com](http://www.ccli.com). CCLI License # 1460973

into second-career shepherding.

Well, not quite. Jesus is the Shepherd, the Good one. What Peter, and what anyone else is called to be, is the Shepherd's helper: feeding the Shepherd's lambs, tending the Shepherd's sheep. Living in and sharing the Shepherd's love.

And because he was following Jesus, for Peter it would be the way of the cross.

You too: living, sharing, tending, feeding. And yes, the way of the cross.

Is Peter the greatest disciple? That's the wrong sort of question. He'd think of himself as the least. What's great is what Jesus keeps doing with the likes of him, and me, and you.

VI

"Saint Peter" by Malcolm Guite

*Impulsive master of misunderstanding  
You comfort me with all your big mistakes;  
Jumping the ship before you make the landing,  
Placing the bet before you know the stakes.*

*I love the way you step out without knowing,  
The way you sometimes speak before you think,  
The way your broken faith is always growing,  
The way he holds you even when you sink.*

*Born to a world that always tried to shame you,  
Your shaky ego vulnerable to shame,  
I love the way that Jesus chose to name you,  
Before you knew how to deserve that name.*

*And in the end your Saviour let you prove  
That each denial is undone by love.<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> Malcolm Guite, Sounding the Seasons: Seventy Sonnets for the Christian Year (London, UK: Canterbury Press, 2012), 53.