

Reflection - Reconciliation

by Larry Totzke

Easter is a celebration of the triumph of Jesus over sin, which provides for a celebration of believers over our sinful condition. We come away from Easter convinced that Jesus loves us. That is true for believers as we look back at what Jesus did for us on the cross, but it may not have been completely true for one of Jesus' disciples. That disciple was Peter.

It was Peter who, at the last supper, was indignant that Jesus would want to wash his feet. Then it was Peter who wanted Jesus to wash his whole body, but Jesus told him that wasn't necessary. Then it was Peter who said he would lay down his life for Jesus. And it was Peter who cut off the high priest's servant's ear when Jesus was being arrested. Brash Peter; that's who he was.

But then it was Peter who three times denied that he even knew Jesus as he was warming himself by the fire during Jesus' appearance before the high priest. And he did it within Jesus' earshot. But once he heard the rooster crow, he realized what he had done, and he suffered great remorse.

Peter was present in the upper room on Easter Sunday evening when Jesus appeared to his disciples there, but there is no evidence that he and Jesus talked with each other. It makes me wonder just how much of Peter's celebration of the resurrection was diminished as he reflected on his denial of Lord at such a crucial time. How would the risen Jesus treat him after Peter had denied him so vocally? Would it be a stain on Peter's record forever?

That brings us to a beautiful scene of reconciliation that is recorded in John 21. After the week long celebration of the festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples left Jerusalem and returned to Galilee. Then one day Peter and six other disciples decided to go fishing. They had fished all night without success. As morning came, Jesus appeared on the shore. He told them to cast their net on the other side of the boat where the Bible records that they caught 153 fish. After they brought the fish to shore, Jesus cooked them breakfast. After breakfast Jesus called Peter aside for a little chat. Here is the record of the chat from John 21:15-19 (ESV):

15 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.” 16 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.” 17 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. 18 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.” 19 (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.”

Peter had denied Jesus three times, and Jesus asked Peter three times, “Do you love me?” Each time Peter answered him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” But he grew more exasperated with each question. Each time Jesus responded to Peter’s answer with the command, “Feed my sheep.” Then he told Peter he would meet an untimely death and he said, “Follow me.” This is a beautiful, tender reconciliation between Jesus and Peter. Jesus wanted to give Peter a chance to verbalize that he loved Jesus, and he wanted to show Peter that he had a special role for Peter to play going forward, a role Jesus had predicted for Peter back when he changed his name from Simon to Peter. He said, “Upon this rock I will build my church.” We see later how Peter responded to Jesus on Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples. It was Peter who stood up before a large crowd and proclaimed the Gospel to them. Many believed, and the church began that day.

In the months and years that followed Peter was the recognized leader of the early church. It was Peter to whom God gave the vision that the church was available for Gentiles as well as for Jews, and Peter willingly bought in. History tells us that Peter eventually did meet an untimely death as did many of the disciples, but before he did he penned two precious letters that are now part of the New Testament. Peter’s reconciliation with Jesus is a prime example of how people can utterly reject the Master only to be completely forgiven and reconciled and go on to serve the Master for the rest of their lives.

Do you need to reconcile with Jesus? He is always willing to reconcile with us, and he always looks past our failures as if they had never happened. He often uses our failures as ways to help us grow. As believers we should take heart in this. I encourage you to reflect on who you are in Christ and how he is calling

you to serve him. Let him direct your path, and do not let past failures restrict you.