

## Restored To Active Service.

Text: John 21:15-24

1) Christ Restores To Active Service

Suggested Hymns:

2) The Restored Seek to Make Good

102, 179, 765, 235, 376

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 21:15–24, <sup>15</sup> *So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of Jonah, 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.”* <sup>16</sup> *He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Tend My sheep.”* <sup>17</sup> *He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of Jonah, 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 all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “Feed My sheep.*

<sup>18</sup> *Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.”* <sup>19</sup> *This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, “Follow Me.”*

<sup>20</sup> *Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, “Lord, who is the one who betrays You?”* <sup>21</sup> *Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, “But Lord, what about this man?”* <sup>22</sup> *Jesus said to him, “If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me.”*

<sup>23</sup> *Then this saying went out among the brethren that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, “If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?”* <sup>24</sup> *This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true.*

(NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

In our text we have the story of a man who was given a second chance to make good in the service of the Lord, the apostle Peter.

May Christ's dealing with the repentant Peter speak to our hearts about the second chance which the resurrection of Jesus Christ opens up to us, and may our restoration to the rank of children of God through Christ inspire us to make good in a life for Him.

Remember that a repentant sinner is one who feels sorry for his sins (contrition) and believes in the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour (faith).<sup>1</sup>

Our theme is *Restored to Active Service*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. Christ Restores To Active Service**

Our text tells of one of nine post-Easter appearances of our Lord. It relates how Jesus restored Peter to active service. No doubt Peter was waiting for the moment to arrive when Jesus would deal with him for what he had done. It was not at all, however, what it might have been.

Jesus doesn't mention his denial in so many words, but the three-times repeated question, "*Do you love Me?*" certainly reminds us of Peter's threefold denial. Jesus knew the answer to the question, but by his answers Peter was given an opportunity to show his repentance before the other disciples.

What is more, it gave Peter an opportunity to think before he spoke this time. Peter was the kind of man who had been quick with answers and affirmations, but on this occasion he is not ready to say that his love to Jesus is greater than that of the others, something he seemed to have implied when he said on that night of denial, "*Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death.*"<sup>2</sup>

The very word which Peter uses for love shows that he does not have the love to Christ, that Christ had toward him. He knew his love to be inferior. Peter was very honest on this occasion, and lest he become guilty again of saying the wrong thing, he lets the Lord decide the question of his love by stating, "*Lord, You know all things.*"

Peter knew how right the Lord had been about him. Peter knew how well Christ could read his heart. Like those tears after the denial, his words on this occasion show repentance and humility, the fruit of the forgiveness which he knew he had, and treasured so very much.

It is as Peter gives these answers of our text to the Lord's question, "*Do you love Me?*" that the Lord speaks words which are music to Peter's ears.

Christ says, "*Feed My lambs. Feed My sheep.*" In that moment in which Peter could have been having thoughts of being discharged as one who could not be trusted, as one who had proved to be guilty of the weakness which Christ ascribed to him and thus disqualified himself for further service, Christ commissions him to do the work of shepherd to people.

These words left no doubt that Peter was being given a second chance. He was being restored to rank as disciple and apostle. Christ entrusted to him the great work of feeding, with the message of the Word, the people for whom Christ had laid down His life as the Good Shepherd, the sheep and lambs that He had gathered and those who were not of the flock who would be gathered, all precious to Him. What a Saviour!

There was no question of Christ's love for Peter. His words on this occasion were like that look at the high priest's palace. They spoke volumes about divine love. Christ was going to use Peter. He was still useful to his Lord. Redeemed, restored, and forgiven, Peter was going to get a chance to do what he had been called to do initially. No, he was not going to have to go back to fishing. Rather he would become once again a fisher of men.

This action of the risen Christ gives us something to think about so far as our own lives are concerned. Not only does it show us the Saviour's boundless love to a fallen man, but it reminds us of His action in our lives as well.

Through His life, death, and resurrection, which have been the centre of our thoughts in these last weeks, Christ has opened up a second chance for the whole generation of fallen men to be a special generation of men. Christ's life, death, and resurrection open up the possibility for men to serve the purpose for which God made them in the first place — to live a life of active service to Him.

What Christ intends for all men has already taken place in your life. In coming to faith in Christ you have not only been forgiven for your past as Peter

was forgiven for his, but you have been restored to rank and commissioned to active service to Christ. You have been given a second chance too.

Not only to Peter but also to us God could have said, *“You are all through. You can now go ahead and fret over your fall. You had your chance and failed.”* Instead, however, through Christ’s death and resurrection God says to us individually: *“I have forgiven you. You are restored to the rank of My child. In Christ I have re-created you. I have made you whole.”*

How happy a person is who is told that he has been given a break and that his past will not be held against him! How good it makes him feel! How excited and how exciting life suddenly becomes as he says to himself, *“What a new lease on life!”*

Unless we have celebrated Easter in vain, something akin to this should be happening to us as we say to ourselves, *“This is the biggest blessing I have ever received. God wants to use me. My past doesn’t disqualify me.”*

Furthermore, just as the risen Christ directed Peter immediately to the goals and challenges of the new life that was opened up to him, so the risen Christ directs us to these goals and challenges in this post-Easter season. He sets before us, as He did before Peter, the assignments that are to be carried out by us as individuals and as a congregation. The risen Christ wasted no time redirecting the life of Peter toward active service.

He comes and confronts us one week after Easter and tells us too that there is work to do, a life to be lived in the interest of people for whom He died, young and old alike. He gave Peter enough time and no more to assess his life. He gives us enough time and no more to assess our life in His service. He forces us to see what has been in order that we learn valuable lessons from it for the future.

Jesus, however, does not allow us to live in the past, to become crippled by the past for service in the future. He sets before us the challenge and the privilege of discipleship in the 21st century. He knows what these are. He knows what it will mean for us even as He knew what the first-century disciples had to face.

To be sure, He does not want to hear about a post-Easter letdown from us. He sees no need for the question, *“Easter’s over. Now what?”* He asks us to minister to people, all people. He asks us to get the Word out about the second

chance which His life, death, and resurrection hold out to those in a fallen and broken world. He wants them fed with the Word which restores them as well as us.

## **2. The Restored Seek to Make Good**

Restored to active service, given a second chance, Peter was determined, under Christ, to make good. He did too.

This is not to say that he did not have much to learn about service. The New Testament points out that he still had some growing to do when it came to the scope of his task.

The vision in the story of Cornelius is one incident where the risen Christ had to make clear to him the scope of his task.<sup>3</sup> Paul too had to rebuke him on one occasion.<sup>4</sup> No return to the Law, you are justified by faith in Christ.

Peter matured and became a pillar of the early church. He followed Christ as Christ called to him again on the occasion of our text even as Christ had done three years earlier. He glorified his Lord even as his Lord predicted. In his old age, according to tradition, Peter died a martyr's death.

To the day of his death he fed the lambs, the children, which had irritated him on one occasion during the ministry of Christ.<sup>5</sup> He fed the sheep with the wholesome, sustaining food of the Gospel. He knew that Christ's Gospel was the Word that endures forever.

He took a man like Mark under his care. Mark too had been given a second chance in service, and Peter helped him grow too. Mark is also called John Mark.

Mark had not been the helper he was supposed to be on the first missionary tour, deserting them at Perga in Pamphylia.<sup>6</sup> Paul was not ready to trust him as a helper on this second missionary trip.

However, Barnabas gave his cousin Mark a second chance by taking him along on the visit to Cyprus.

Later on Mark was part of Paul's group when Paul was imprisoned at Rome the first time.<sup>7</sup> Paul furthermore asked the Christians at Colosse to welcome Mark.<sup>8</sup> Near the end of his life, during his second imprisonment, Paul asked that Mark be brought to him to help with the ministry.<sup>9</sup>

Mark also worked with Peter<sup>10</sup> and became the author of the second Gospel. In the greeting at the end of 1 Peter chapter 5 Peter even refers to Mark as his son. Mark learned a lot from Peter. The theme in Mark is sacrifice and service.

We can commend Barnabas for salvaging an important worker for Christ's kingdom. Especially, we can thank God, who found use for a man who once failed to do his duty, giving him a second chance.

As we read Peter's epistles, we hear how he declared the work of God and how he reminded Christians who they were. He wrote of events in the life of Christ. He was a real pastor to His people. He counselled them in affliction and doubt. To those entrusted to him he held out the hope that was theirs in Christ. He kept calling to their remembrance what he had proclaimed to them.

Yes, with the strength which Christ gave, Peter made good on that second chance. He is remembered today as one of the greatest apostles of Christ. Many a church is named "St. Peter's."

Through the message of Christ's resurrection, with its assurances to us of our restoration and our second chance, the Spirit of God seeks to drive us to make good in our service to Christ as well. We still have much to learn about the scope of our task, the urgency of our task, and the blessedness of our task as individuals and as a Christian congregation. The same God who has restored us to sonship in Christ and commissioned us to serve our Saviour wants to help us grow through the Word.

As we look at the needs of God's people, young and old alike, we become aware of their great need to be fed and led.

In our homes parents have a great work to do. In the home today many are not being fed the pure milk of the Word in order that they might grow thereby.

As we look at a spiritually starved world, we know that there are ever so many who have yet to hear what we have heard again this day, the message of restoration through Jesus Christ.

God wants to involve us more and more in the service for which He gave His Son into death for us. What a waste it would be if we did not, in a life of active service to the Lord, use this second chance opened up to us by Christ's resurrection.

In the service of Christ, we are being called upon now to put forth the effort required. Let us make the most of it and in the spirit of the great words of Paul to the congregation at Corinth, <sup>58</sup> ***Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.***<sup>11</sup> Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Luther's Small Catechism*, Q 274

<sup>2</sup> Luke 22:33

<sup>3</sup> Acts 10:17-43

<sup>4</sup> Gal. 2:11-16

<sup>5</sup> Mark 10:13-16

<sup>6</sup> Acts 13:13

<sup>7</sup> Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24

<sup>8</sup> Colossians 4:10

<sup>9</sup> 2 Timothy 4:11

<sup>10</sup> 1 Peter 5:13

<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:58