

Several years ago, we visited the Great Lakes...  
And part of that trip was going to Mackinac Island  
And the Upper Peninsula area, where  
**the famous Edmund Fitzgerald**  
went down in a wintry November storm.  
Did you know there are over 5,000 wrecks deep and undisturbed there?  
If you think about it, our lives have wreckage  
some lying right below the surface, and some way far down.  
We are all wounded, and we are all  
wounded at different places and different depths.  
Peter was wrecked, and it was down deep.

### **3 Simon Peter told them, "I'm going fishing."**

Peter exclaimed these words as he headed back  
to fill the emptiness in his life with the familiar,  
back to the water and the shores of the Sea of Galilee.  
Half the disciples dutifully followed him.  
Once again, Peter led the way, even in his wandering.  
If their leader wanted to fish, the disciples wanted to join him.  
Even though Jesus had already appeared to them  
twice when they were staying in Jerusalem,  
the disciples were still confused, bewildered, and unsettled.

When Jesus wasn't right there with them, it didn't seem real.  
Peter, in particular, was in a free fall.  
Have you ever been there? Deep in a funk?  
Peter had assured Jesus that he had His back,  
and instead, he stabbed his Lord in the back three times.  
Jesus obviously knew what Peter had done  
but hadn't mentioned the cursing or the  
denying in His Upper Room appearances...yet.  
Would He? Could Peter ever be trusted by Jesus again?  
Feeling inadequate, embarrassed, and doubting  
whether he had it in him to be a disciple, Peter ran away.  
Have you ever wanted to get away from a mistake  
you made so badly that you would do anything?

Peter ran away from his denials and betrayals.  
He ran back to what he knew best,  
back to what he did in his former life.  
What Peter didn't yet quite get is something that

I need, and maybe you need to be reminded of. And what is that?  
that **God doesn't turn God's back on us.**

It is we who, for whatever reason,  
turn our backs or don't turn back to God,  
no matter how much grace God churns out and turns our way.

At night, the seven disciples cast their nets,  
not to catch the hungry, as Jesus had commissioned them,  
but to catch fish to sell to the hungry.

Fishermen fished when it was dark,  
so they could sell the fish fresh in the morning.

At least they were good at fishing.

**They set out in a boat, but throughout the night they caught nothing.**

We can't even do this right.

These fishing disciples found out that they couldn't go back.

Their former life no longer existed.

They couldn't go back, and they couldn't go forward.

They were stuck. And their nets were empty. They are empty.

**4 Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples didn't realize it was Jesus. 5**

**Jesus called to them, "Children**

It was daybreak again.

The disciples saw a stranger on the shore.

The figure in the distance addressed them as "friends" or "children"  
which was an endearing term but one with authority.

Once again, Jesus greeted them with a question.

**have you caught anything to eat?" They answered him, "No."**

"You didn't catch anything, did you?"

The disciples admitted failure.

The voice told them to give it one more chance

**6 He said, "Cast your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some."**

Thinking the stranger had an elevated view of the water,  
they cast their nets to the right.

**and there were so many fish that they couldn't haul in the net. 7 Then the disciple whom  
Jesus loved said to Peter, "It's the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard it was the Lord, he  
wrapped his coat around himself (for he was naked) and jumped into the water.**

John recognized Jesus first.

Peter trusted that John was right, put on some clothes,

**jumped into the sea and swam to shore.**

But you know what I find interesting here?

Even though Peter couldn't wait to see Jesus,  
he also couldn't be vulnerable, naked.

What was his standing with Jesus?

He couldn't be sure.

You see, Peter was still hiding from Jesus  
because of his broken relationship.

Don't we all do that? Maybe you are doing that now?

As Peter swam to Jesus, **8 The other disciples followed in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they weren't far from shore.9 When they landed, they saw a fire there, with fish on it, and some bread. 10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you've just caught."**

They found Jesus cooking breakfast,  
So, Jesus invited his friends to come eat some bread  
and to add some of their own fish with him  
as he cooked around a fire  
But not just any fire, we will find out.

**11 Simon Peter got up and pulled the net to shore. It was full of large fish. Yet the net hadn't torn, even with so many fish.**

They pulled in **153 fish—a "perfect catch,"**  
And did you know that if John, a Jew and a fisherman,  
counted the fish in a Jewish manner,  
called gematria, the number becomes "I Am the Lord Thy God."  
The disciples' net should have ripped,  
But they couldn't be torn apart.

Jesus gives all of us a bigger mission than we can handle,  
a challenge that will always exceed our abilities and even our nets.

What yielded a huge catch of fish? **Obedience.**

Obedience bears fruit.

Once you're open to new possibilities;  
once you realize that your way is not the only way,  
that you can drop your nets and throw them  
in a different direction;  
once you hear God's Word in a different way, the sky is the limit.

In the missionary task of fishing on our own, we fail.  
But with Jesus, our catch is an overload.

Although the disciples are overloaded with confusion,  
Jesus overloads them with blessings.

**12 Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast."**

Jesus was purposely re-creating the setting,  
even the exact charcoal fire, charcoals of coals it says.  
Do you know where the only other place in the whole bible  
Where this exact word is used?  
When Peter denied him around the charcoal fire earlier.  
Peter's restoration was done before the disciples,  
so that there could be no question of Jesus' forgiveness.  
It was Peter whom Jesus sent back to get more fish  
to add to what He was already cooking.  
Peter must participate in the haul, and more than that,  
be the one who brought the fish to the fire.  
Peter went back to what he knew best.  
But Jesus spoke and welcomed all of them  
back to what they knew best together:  
fishing for and feeding people.

And there are many ways of serving Jesus.  
One is to cast yourself into the sea and hurtle  
headlong into the future, as Peter did.  
Another way is to stay in the boat and bring the fish to shore,  
as the disciples did.  
Another way is to cook the food, or serve the tables,  
or attend the fishing party.  
We each hear the same voice but are assigned different missions.  
No one is better than the other.  
(Buttercup Festival)

None of the disciples could bring themselves to ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came, took the bread, and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish. **14 This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.**

And it is here we hear the Forgiving Voice of Jesus

**15 When they finished eating, Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon son of John**

As they were eating, Jesus addressed Peter directly.  
*When Jesus first met Peter,*  
He called him Simon son of Jonah.

Jesus then nicknamed him Cephas or Petros (Greek).  
Now Jesus addressed him as Simon son of John,  
the name he had when he was first called.  
Why back to Peter's former, formal name?

Because Jesus gave Peter's calling and calling out a do-over.  
You know a do-over? Do you need a do-over?  
A really big eraser to erase all your mistakes?  
Around a fire, Peter betrayed Jesus three times.  
Around this fire by the sea,  
Peter is asked three do-over questions  
before Jesus could bring him back.

In Peter's day, no contract was taken seriously  
unless it had been reiterated three times before witnesses.  
But this wasn't like any other contract:  
here the litmus test was love.  
Jesus was forcing Peter to come to terms with his past,  
to not block the enormity of his betrayal or the truth of who he is.  
Peter had to pass through his woundedness  
to be called back into a renewed relationship with Jesus.  
Peter was too strong to follow Jesus.

**We track the mind of God in the footsteps of Jesus;**  
**we touch the Father's heart in the wounds of the Son.**

The wounded Christ was opening up a festering wound,  
forcing Peter to face his woundedness  
so he no longer had to live there  
but could find his home in the wounds and weakness of love.

do you love me more than these?"  
Simon replied, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you."  
what are the "more than these" in Jesus' question  
Are the "more than these" more than these fish,  
more than your profession, more than making a living?  
What about us? How much more do we love Jesus?  
Or maybe "more than these" could also mean  
"Do you love Me more than these other disciples do?"

Once again, Jesus began their conversation with a question:  
"Do you agape Me?" In other words, "Do you love Me sacrificially, unconditionally?  
Do you love Me as God loves?"

Peter responded honestly: "I phileo You."  
It means, "I will always be Your friend."

Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." **16 Jesus asked a second time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Simon replied, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you."**

The word tend here is the word used for feeding large flocks of young animals in all kinds of pasture.

Jesus tried again. Do you agape me?

Peter repeated his earlier profession of faith. I am your friend, Jesus.

Jesus said to him, "Take care of my sheep."

The word feed here means to shepherd flocks of sheep.

Jesus then gave Peter one last try.

But this time, Jesus humbled himself to bless Peter's best and adopted Peter's highest word for love

**17 He asked a third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"**

Peter was sad that Jesus asked him a third time,

"Do you love me?" He replied, "Lord, you know everything; you know I love you."

Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep.

Peter was upset that Jesus had to ask a third time.

And Jesus was even sadder that Peter could only "friend" him.

It is Jesus who has the right to call us friends, not we who have the right to call Jesus friend.

It was always dangerous to have a conversation with Peter, speaking was his mode of thinking.

So that Peter would not get lost in the midst of his own hot air,

Jesus organized their conversation around

three missional directives conveyed

in these carefully chosen metaphors.

**Tend my lambs.**

Feed by sheep.

Shepherd my flock.

Jesus defined ministry with verbs not nouns.

You know it's Jesus' voice when you're being stretched

to reach out to those you don't want to,

or wish you didn't have to, and go in directions you don't wish to go.

Jesus is always moving beyond Himself,

always seeing the best in others.  
Every word Jesus speaks “vibes”  
in your ears these tremors of truth:  
God created you uniquely,  
loves you unconditionally,  
forgives you unreservedly,  
empowers you unbelievably,  
enfolds you unwaveringly,  
calls you unpredictably.

That is the forgiving voice of Jesus.  
One of the things I say often is that Christ  
is at his strongest when we are at our weakest.  
And the more aware we become of our limitations and  
lacking like Peter, the more we are aware of and  
able to hear Jesus’ Forgiving voice the loudest.

Can you hear his forgiving voice?