

Running to Jesus

John 21:1-14 (NIV)

¹ Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: ² Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ³ "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. ⁴ Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. ⁵ He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. ⁶ He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. ⁷ Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. ⁸ The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. ⁹ When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." ¹¹ So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and 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.

Earlier this year in February, we heard the account of when Jesus commissioned Peter to be one of his 12 apostles, a fisher of men. In the first year of his public ministry, Jesus was teaching by the Lake of Gennesaret. Due to the crowd of people around him, he got into one of Peter's boats and set out a bit from shore to teach the whole group. When he had finished, he told Peter to let down his nets in the deep for a catch of fish. Even though Peter and his crew had had no success the whole night, he did it. And they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break! When Peter took this all in, he exclaimed, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" (Luke 5:8) He wanted to run from Jesus. But Jesus told him to not be afraid and then he called Peter to go and fish for people from now on.

After that moment, we see a lot of Peter running to Jesus. He as well as James and John left all their fishing gear behind and ran to Jesus to take up that calling to be fishers of men. Later, when Jesus came to the disciples on the Sea of Galilee, walking on water, Peter was the one who asked to come to Jesus on the water, running to Jesus - until he took his eyes off of Jesus and focused on the wind and waves and started to sink. When many left Jesus after the feeding of the 5,000 and Jesus' Bread of Life sermon, Peter ran to Jesus saying that only Jesus had the words of eternal life. On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus told Peter that he would deny Jesus three times. Peter countered by basically saying that he would always run to be with Jesus, even if he was running into certain death by doing so.

Then came Jesus' arrest in Gethsemane, and Peter ran, as well as the rest of the disciples. Peter did come back later that night and was warming himself by the fires while the mock trial of Jesus was taking place. There, he was accused of being one of Jesus' followers. Three times Peter vehemently swore that he didn't know the man. The rooster crowed after the third denial while Jesus was being moved. Jesus and Peter locked eyes, and Peter ran away, bitterly weeping for what he had done.

Do you see yourself in Peter – that one minute you are boldly running to Jesus and other moments you are running from him? Does your life mirror Peter's in that when you were confirmed, you made vows that you would continue steadfast in all of the Bible's teaching, faithfully conform your life to them, be faithful in the use of Word and sacrament, and endure all things, even death, rather than fall away from them, and you boldly said, "I do"? Basically, you vowed to always run to Jesus. But, as soon as it was over, did you run from Jesus, run from church? Or was it more of a drifting away, that you kept going to church through high school, but life happened, job had you working on Sundays, you were strapped for cash, church became less of a priority, that you still prayed from time to time, but you weren't running to Jesus?

Maybe you found that sometimes in life you were running back to Jesus in a time of great need – of a health scare, of depression, of loss, of financial need. But then once you got it, you ran to Jesus for a while yet until you didn't. The drifting start happening all over again. Or did you run away from Jesus because life was so bad and it wasn't getting better while running to Jesus?

Maybe you've run from God because you feel the weight of your sins like Peter did. You know what you've done. You know your sins, and they grieve you. You feel so unworthy, that what you've done makes you dirty, that you're totally inadequate. The sins of your past are too much. Get away from me, Jesus! And you ran from God, thinking you could not be forgiven, that you could not ever find a way to stand in his presence.

Did you run or drift away from Jesus for so long that you were embarrassed to ever come back? Did the dread of people asking you where you've been and you having to explain and justify why you had been away so long leave you paralyzed, unable to get up and go to Jesus?

Wouldn't some of these same thoughts be running through Peter's mind? He had failed to keep his word. He had denied Jesus. He had sins that weighed him down. He had run from Jesus. But Jesus' resurrection changed things.

It's not recorded in the Gospel accounts, but thanks to the Apostle Paul we know that Jesus appeared to Peter personally on the very first Easter before he appeared to the rest of the 12, almost as if Jesus was running to Peter to let him know that he is risen. We don't know what Jesus said to him then, but we do know that on that same day, he came and announced peace to him and the other disciples who had locked themselves in that room. The risen Jesus brought peace to Peter's troubled heart. Jesus ran to Peter so that Peter would know that even his sins were forgiven. This changed Peter.

We saw the change in Peter from our reading of John's Gospel account today. Jesus showed up when 7 disciples were by the Sea of Galilee. They had been fishing all night and caught nothing. Then a man from the shore called out to them to have them throw their net down on the other side of the boat, and they caught a huge number of fish - 153! (Starting to sound familiar?) John figured out who the man was and told Peter, "It is the Lord!" Instead of falling to his knees or trying to steer the boat away from shore since he was a sinful man who had run from Jesus, Peter couldn't wait and had to run to Jesus right away. As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. (verse 7)

Peter had run from Jesus, not once, but twice, and yet here he is now running to Jesus. No longer did Peter say, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" (Luke 5:8) The risen Jesus had run to Peter, showed him that he was totally and completely forgiven. He runs to us today with the same message. The risen Christ has taken away our fear and dread that our sins build up in us, all the ways that we can't ever imagine being with God. Jesus has run to us today and given us this same good news. He has made it right between you and him. He wants you and me with him. We are forgiven! We have peace with God because Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Since you are here, listening to this message today, you know that the risen Christ has run to you and now run to him. We have been changed just like Peter was. So now, as much as we can relate with Peter, I want you to think of yourself as John, the one who said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" We know of people who are running from Jesus like Peter did. How can we be John to them? How can we point out that the risen Jesus is running to them, calling to them, wanting to show them his hands and sides to know that they are forgiven, wanting the person who ran or drifted from him to have a meal with him? Maybe the place to start is by asking yourself what did you need when you were running or drifting from Jesus? Can you be that for the person you know is running from Jesus?

As you consider that, remember that the risen Christ has come to you and changed you. He has invited you to be with him, showing you that your sins and my sins are truly taken away, that we have peace with God. Help us, God, to always run towards you and to be like John and point others to you as well. Help us all be turned from running from you to running towards you because Christ is risen; he is risen, indeed! Alleluia! Amen.