FAILING FORWARD--Simon Peter's Story
Confrontation and Restoration
John 21:9-23
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Like Simon Peter, we fail. The key is to fail forward. Do you want a shock? God is not surprised by our weakness and failure. I saw this quote the other day: "When God put a call on your life, He already factored in your stupidity."

Several days after Jesus' resurrection, Simon Peter encounters the Risen Christ. Oh, how Simon has been dreading this! First of all, note that the scene is near a charcoal fire (v. 9). Does anyone remember what kind of fire was burning the night of Peter's denial? Charcoal. John likes bookends. Do you suppose that Peter was able to digest his food at breakfast that morning? The situation was similar to a teenager who had dented the fender of Dad's car and come in late the night before. Sitting there at breakfast, waiting for the sword to fall. Tension!

And then, v. 15, it begins. The question, "Do you love me more than these?" is asked three times. Why? Because Peter denied three times. What an interesting question. Not, "What were you thinking?" Or, "Why did you do it?" But do you love me? Augustine, born in the fourth century, once wrote that if you want to know if a person is good, don't ask what he believes or hopes; ask what he loves.

Scholars like to bat around: What does "more than these" mean? More than these things, your fishing career? More than others love me? It could be either or both. I'm going to guess that it means the latter. Because Peter was so competitive. On Easter morning, he actually tried to outrun another disciple to the empty tomb (John 20:3-4). Also, remember Peter bragging? "Others may forsake you, but I never will" (Matt. 26:33). But now, Peter is humiliated by his failure and answers, "You know I love you." Note that he does not say "You know I love you *more than these others love you*" because maybe he is finally done with comparisons and competition, all the bragging knocked out of him, all the judging of others gone.

The Risen Christ does two beautiful things, neither of which were required: he forgives Simon Peter and he restores him in service. "Feed my sheep." Do you suppose that sometimes we hide behind our previous failures as an excuse not to serve the Lord? Even though you've stumbled, you have failed forward. God forgives and God wants you to serve. We are currently seeking Stephen Ministers, church members who can walk beside another hurting person for a designated period of time, to listen and care. Feed my sheep. We need bus drivers. We need Bible teaching leaders. We need people to take a turn in the preschool area. Feed my lambs. Our past is past. Jesus starts with us where we are.

Note that the quality of our service to others is tied to the quality of our love for Jesus. If you don't keep falling in love with Jesus, you won't be able to sustain service to others. Peter

Scazzero writes, "Leadership in the church can do violence to the soul. The endless needs that routinely hurtle toward us can leave us exhausted and irritable. Who has time to enjoy Jesus…or life?" [*The Emotionally Healthy* Church, p. 207].

But at the end of our story today, Simon Peter's competitive spirit and ego-centric behavior show up again, even after he is forgiven and recommissioned. He points at the other disciple and asks, "What about him?" (v. 21). Jesus' answers him, "Peter, you are free from the responsibility of running your own life—and everybody else's!" (v. 22). This is precisely why Peter had to be confronted with his failure. Those of us who cannot accept weakness in ourselves will never be able to accept the weakness in others.

And then in v. 22, Jesus said two words: "Follow me." In the Greek, it's three words: "you—follow me!". The first words Simon Peter ever heard from Jesus are now the final words recorded by John: follow me. Failing and following. Following and failing. Forward.