

3 Strikes and a Lot of Sheep

John 21:15-17

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WATCH/LISTEN: <https://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/3-strikes-and-a-lot-of-sheep/>

There's a story of a little boy who went outside one day to practice his baseball skills. He got the ball ready and the bat in the other hand. He scanned the imaginary stadium around him and declared, *"I am the world's greatest hitter!"* He threw the ball in the air and took a mighty swing and missed. Strike one. He picked up the ball, tapped his foot with the bat, shook out his arms and then got the bat ready. He assumed the position and declared in a loud voice again, *"I am the world's greatest hitter!"* He swung the bat.....and missed again. Strike 2. He wiped his hands on his pants, picked up the ball, and got the bat ready. With such confidence he said, *"I am the world's greatest hitter!"* This time, he swung the bat with all of his might....and missed again. Strike 3.

The boy took a deep breath and sighed and then looked up and around at his imaginary fans. He straightened his ball cap, picked up the ball, got the bat ready, and declared, *"I am the world's greatest pitcher."*

No one wants to get strikes. Because we know ... 3 strikes and you are _____ (OUT!)

I wonder if Simon Peter had ever played any form of baseball.

He kept replaying Jesus' words in his mind, *"I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times."* He remembered being shocked and appalled that Jesus believed he would deny him. After all, Peter didn't do things halfway. When he just jumped to follow Jesus, he jumped with both feet! He loved Jesus! Surely, he didn't even have it in him to deny him.

You are not one of his disciples are you?" the girl at the door asked Peter.

He replied, "I am not." Strike 1

As Simon Peter stood warming himself he was asked, "You are not one of his disciples are you?"

He denied it, saying, "I am not." Strike 2

"Didn't I see you with him in the olive grove?" Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow. Strike 3

3 times.... 3 strikes....is he out?

It didn't help that every morning he woke up to that awful sound.... a rooster crowing. It was a painful reminder that he had denied the One he loved the most.

That weekend after Jesus had died on the cross must have felt like an eternity. He had been so confident...and so cocky before.. *"Others might betray you, Lord, but I would NEVER do so."* And then, he had. 3 times. How was he supposed to face the other disciples? How did he face his own brother? And, how does one even begin to construct an apology to Jesus in a situation like this? His heart was troubled. He was embarrassed. He was ashamed. He was angry at himself. And, I imagine, for once in his life he didn't know what to say or do.

Just days ago, Mary Magdalene had come running to them saying, *"He's alive! He's alive. He told me "go and tell my disciples and Peter."* He must have wondered, *"And Peter'....why did he call me out? Was he separating me from the rest of the group because I had denied him or was He telling me there is hope for mercy and forgiveness?"* Peter sprinted to the tomb and saw for himself; Jesus was not there!

So....now what? Peter had never been good at waiting. Sitting still had never come easily to him, and so he did the one thing that made sense to him in life and in that moment....he went fishing. Some of the other disciples joined him. All night long, they tried to catch fish and were not having any success. They were tired, wet, and probably a little cranky. And suddenly they caught a whiff of smoke. What was that flash of light? They squint their eyes looking to shore. There was a campfire, and someone was roasting breakfast. That someone called out, *"Friends, haven't you caught any fish?" "No." "Try casting your net on the other side."* Really? Like that was going to make any difference! But they wearily cast the net again.

But this time, there were suddenly fish flying everywhere ... The net was full and surprisingly not breaking under the considerable strain. It was about this moment, John looked up and said to Simon Peter, *"It's the Lord!"* Peter wasted no time but jumped in the water and swam to shore. He couldn't get there quick enough! The others followed with the boat bringing with them so many fish.

Peter jumped up to get the fish out of the boat when Jesus asked for them to share their catch. He would have done anything for Jesus, but he didn't know what to say. He was always saying the wrong thing. How did one apologize for such grievous and disappointing actions? The

smoke from the fire was reminding him of that other fire where he had denied Jesus. He must have been a bit silent as they all ate together.

Mia, Jack, and Karter are going to share our scripture reading from John 21, and we'll find out what happened next.

Narrator: *When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter*

Jesus: *Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these?*

Peter: *Yes, Lord. You know that I love you.*

Narrator: *Jesus said*

Jesus: *Feed my lambs.*

Narrator: *Again Jesus said*

Jesus: *Simon son of John, do you truly love me?*

Narrator: *He answered*

Peter: *Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.*

Jesus: *Take care of my sheep*

Narrator: *The third time he said to him*

Jesus: *Simon, son of John, do you love me?*

Narrator: *Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time*

Jesus: *Do you love me?*

Narrator: *He said*

Peter: *Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.*

Jesus: *Feed my sheep.*

All: *This is the word of God. Thanks be to God.*

The first time: *Do you truly love me more than these?*

Who were the "these"? We can't see where Jesus might have pointed or directed with his hand as he posed the question. Was he talking about the fish? *Peter, do you love me more than fishing? More than life that is comfortable, predictable, and familiar to you? More than your identity as a fisherman?* Was he talking about the other disciples? *Peter, do you still think you are more committed than the other disciples?* There was that statement running through Peter's mind again, *"Lord others might betray you, but I would NEVER do so."*

Peter responded, *"Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."*

And Jesus said *"feed my lambs."* What did this mean? Peter recalled Jesus telling him that he would become a fisher of men and now he was saying he was to be a shepherd? He had

walked with Jesus long enough to know that Jesus had often referred to people as his sheep. He was offering Peter an invitation to continue following him. A little bit of shame chipped off, and a little bit of hope started to bubble up.

Simon son of John, do you truly love me?

Again, Peter expressed with great emotion, *“Yes Lord, you KNOW that I love you.”*

Take care of my sheep. Jesus’ words recorded in John 13 that we have been memorizing as a congregation might have been coming back about now. That night when Jesus had washed the disciples’ feet flashed through his mind *“I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”* Show love to people. Humble yourselves. Serve others. Feed my sheep.

And then again, *“Simon, son of John, do you love me?”*

With his heart breaking that Jesus would have to ask a third time, Peter declared it again, *“Yes, Lord. You know that I love you.”*

And Jesus said, *“Feed my sheep.”*

Three times Peter had denied even knowing Jesus. Instead of 3 strikes and then he was out, Jesus forgave him. He extended grace and mercy and love.

Sometimes, we may feel like Peter – wondering if we have had one too many strikes. We approach our Savior a bit red faced, full of regret, and not completely knowing what to say.

Jesus asks us, too, *“Do you love me? Feed my sheep.”*

And just like He did for Simon Peter, He calls us tenderly by name. He shows His never-ending love for us. He forgives us and cleanses us.

1 John 1:9 says, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”*

Friends, He died on that cross for you and for me, but the story did not end there. We serve a risen Savior who is inviting us to follow Him with all that we are... with both words and actions. He sees us. He knows us. He forgives us. He welcomes us. He’s inviting us to see what love can do. How will you answer today?