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Encounters: The Shameful John 21:15-25

Last week we found seven of the disciples bobbing on the Sea of Galilee. Even though Jesus was alive, it was dawning on them that their future was nothing like they had envisioned. They were wistful; sad over the death of their vision...as well have been at times. They needed to sort things out... so they fished.

But one of them was suffering a much more toxic emotion than wistfulness. Peter was drowning in shame. Jesus had given him his new name which means "Rocky." But Peter didn't feel like a rock right now. He had talked tough; he always did. When Jesus warned the disciples that they would abandon him, "Rocky" spoke up and said, "I don't care what any of these guys do; I will **never** abandon you." That must have played well with the rest of the boys standing there!

Jesus' reply was haunting. "Not only will you deny me, Peter... you will do so three times!" And that's what happened. The night of Jesus' arrest, three different people accused Peter of being one of his disciples. And each time, with increasing volume and profanity, Peter denied he even knew the man! When Peter raised his eyes and saw Jesus looking at him from across the courtyard... he was devastated. He wept bitterly.

Now, days later, Peter still reeks of shame. So when he realizes it is Jesus standing on the beach—that this is his chance to make things right—he can't even wait to row the boat back. He plunges into the water and swims to shore to find breakfast waiting. Listen to what happens after the meal.

Rocky! What a joke. More like "Sandy!" Peter talked big, but when the chips were down, he crumbled. He was supposed to be the leader of the twelve. But except for Judas, no disciple failed Jesus more spectacularly than Peter. So when Jesus pulled him aside after breakfast, it must have been intense, don't you think? Especially when Jesus opened the conversation with his full name: "Simon bar Jonah. Simon son of John." Did anything good ever come after you heard your dad call you by your full name? "Mark James Toone!" "Cooper James Toone!" It usually meant a trip to the woodshed? But this conversation went nothing like what shame filled Peter expected.

Once again this week, I invited you to share in the writing of this sermon. Once again, you came through. I asked you to tell of your most shameful moment. Here

they are... eight pages worth. What an honor to be entrusted with this. I felt like I was sitting in the confessional booth with you. What a privilege! And such brokenness! One man shared that just the typing the story caused him to break into tears again. It is years past; he knows he's forgiven. But the memory of the shame is still so deep and so raw. Listen:

I spanked my young step children and left bruises on their bodies... 11 years ago I lost custody of my 2 kids due to a series of bad choices; I still carry the shame like I wear 2 dead bodies around my neck... the day my wife discovered I had 20+ affairs during our relationship... getting pregnant at 19 out of wedlock; my priest and parents forcing me into marriage which added to the shame... I planned my suicide when my ex-husband convinced me that the world would be a better place had I never been born and that my children would be better raised by someone else... when I confessed to my wife of having an affair with a co-worker. She had had no idea. I broke her heart. It was the kill shot to our marriage.... Our youngest son is a drug addict, and is incarcerated 3,000 miles away from us. When we are asked about him and answer, the silence is deafening. ...

We had fewer responses to this request than we did for "loss" or "fear" or "doubt." But are you surprised? This is shame... one of the most powerful and debilitating of human emotions. The very nature of shame is... we don't want to talk about it. We want to hide it. We want to hide from it. Why? Because we are ashamed! Some more:

When the reality hit in 2009 that my "so-called" dating was out of control. In my journal I refer to it as nothing more than a cheap prostitute... in my junior high class there was a girl; unpopular, unkempt, and of questionable character. Between classes my friends and I came upon her in the hall. I organized a circle around her and we all laughed and proceeded to dance around her singing "Ring Around the Rosie". It ended and we all went to class laughing at how clever we were. Just a few years later, I found out she had died of a terrible disease. It still haunts me...

Is there any other negative emotion that has a longer half-life than shame? And like radioactivity, it is just as toxic. I'm not talking about the shame you feel because you have done something wrong. That is God's way of correcting you. I'm talking about the shame that leads you to say "I am something wrong! I am so stained and bad that I am unworthy of love."

"...my suicide attempt one year ago... I did my all-church survey on Saturday. It made me evaluate how "tepid" and "doubtful" I had become... the day I received a letter in the mail from my 13 year old little girl; 'Daddy, I love you. Please stop drinking daddy, please. Please go to rehab and get better.' I curled up on the floor and wept from the pit of my soul... Forty years ago I fell in love with a married man my father's age... Looking for a father but not recognizing that was what was

happening. I was young and married. It flattered his ego and the emotional tie nearly shattered mine."

"Shame on you!" Anyone ever wagged their finger at you and said those words? Sure. It was you! Looking in your mirror, wagging your finger at yourself. Shame, shame, shame! Isn't that what Peter was suffering with that day on the shore when Jesus pulled him aside? Let's look at a powerful story of restoration and start with this question: What doesn't Jesus mention to Peter? Jesus never mentions Peter's denial. Why? Because he didn't need to! Peter mentioned it to himself all the time. That was all Peter ever thought about. Like every one of us, our shame reminds us of what we did wrong. We don't need anyone's help. Jesus knew that. Never once does He say, "See... I told you, Peter. You got cocky... you got arrogant... but when your moment came, you crashed and burned. How could you fail me so miserably?"

Jesus doesn't even ask, "Are you sorry?" Again, why not? Because the Lord had already heard Peter's bitter weeping. Peter cried his eyes out and poured his heart out the night he betrayed Jesus. And he prayed it a thousand times since, too. "God, please forgive me. God, please forgive me. God, please forgive me."

It's not that repentance and remorse don't matter. Shame can be God's way of pointing out how we have broken his heart. It can drive us back into relationship with Him through repentance. But for most of us who deal with shame, it's not a matter of confessing what we've done and saying we are sorry. We've done it a hundred, hundred times before. I know I have. It's about not believing we are "forgiveable"... not being able to imagine how God could really, truly take our shame—which is scarlet—and make it white as snow.

Notice what Jesus doesn't ask of Peter three times: "Are you repentant? Have you confessed? Have you fasted? Have you beaten yourself up?" That is not the way to deal with shame. That is not the way to restore. What, instead, was Jesus' broken-record message to Peter? "Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me?" Once for every time Peter had sworn, "I do not even know the man!" Do you love me? Notice too Peter's growing humility. He can't bring himself to make one more claim of his devotion to Jesus... can't bring himself to say, "Of course I love you" because he knows how hollow it will all sound. Instead, he defers to his sovereign Lord... every time. "You know that I love you. You know that I love you. You know all things... you know that I love you."

I wonder then, is this the first lesson Jesus offers about dealing with shame: don't deal with it. At least, don't keep dealing with it. Starve it! Neglect it! Give it to Jesus. Let Him deal with it. You will never think, fast, repent or will yourself out of shame. Long term, smothering shame is a tool of the enemy to keep you in bondage. The way out of shame is to starve it for affection; to turn that attention instead to the single most important question from Jesus that every human must answer: Do you love me! Listen to him ask it again and again. Repeat your

response again and again. You don't have to be creative. Pray it over and over again. "Jesus, I do love you, I do love you, I do love you!" That very act begins to starve shame of the attention it must have in order to continue its parasitic existence. How do you get beyond shame? Starve it!

And then this: get to work. It is an amazing grace that Jesus turns to the one living disciple who failed him most miserably and entrusts to him that which was most precious... his flock. There can be no greater encouragement to us "failers" than to comprehend that Jesus loves to meet his broken people, precisely in their shame and failure, sweep it aside and say, "Forget that! I have! You must, too. You have too much work to do to wallow in your shame! I have sheep that belong to me, and I want you to take care of them." Want to get past shame? Starve it! And then put your words to work! Live for Jesus as if you really mean it when you say you are grateful for his forgiveness. Instead of wallowing, use that energy to care for the sheep of Jesus... the ones for whom the Good Shepherd gave his life. Teach a Sunday school class, lead a D Group, volunteer for Young Life, work with our Titus ministry, tutor a kid, join Back up Buddies or Las Amigas... get out of yourself and care for the sheep that Jesus died for.

Something powerful happened in that post-breakfast conversation. Peter was set free from his shame to become the Rock that Christ had always seen in him. Within a few weeks, Peter stood before a Pentecost crowd of thousands and preached one of the greatest sermons ever. 3000 people converted that day. And the Church was off and running under the leadership of Rocky.

Jesus met Peter in his shame that day, and this is what he did with it. [Shred paper] He shredded his shame. [shred] He obliterated it. [shred] Later when Peter wrote to the churches he quoted Isaiah: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." [shred] This is what Jesus wants to do with your shame. [shred] You want to clutch it, re-live it, re-pray it. Jesus wants to shred it. [shred]

So if this is really all that's left of our shame after Jesus is done with it, what do we do? We celebrate! [Throw shredded paper] Jesus has turned our shame into blessing! That is the wonder of our faith. Our best response to this grace is to believe it, receive it and celebrate it... which is what this meal is about! This is a meal of celebration!

Do you notice when the meal takes place in the story? Before Peter is restored. As a matter of fact, the meal was part of the means by which Jesus restored Peter. In his grace and hospitality, he welcomed Peter to a meal and then pronounced him restored.

So this morning, in the name of Jesus, I offer to you this meal—His meal—a meal He has prepared for you as a means of grace, blessing, forgiveness and restoration. If you can say, "Jesus, I love you," He wants to use this meal to shred

your shame. So here's what I invite you to do... [Explain colored card; take a moment to write down the Shame you want shredded... come forward, answer question from bread person, "Do you love Jesus? With "I Do love Jesus", then from cup person, "Feed His sheep." Partake; then tear it up into tiny pieces and throw it in the air... celebrate how Jesus has set you free from shame]

Sermon Questions

- REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER: Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- PRAY TOGETHER: Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- DIG DEEPER
 1. Review all of chapter 21, particularly paying attention to Peter's part. What is going on with "Rocky?"
 2. Please define shame. What is it? Why do you suppose that fewer people were willing to share their "shame" stories?
 3. How does Jesus deal with Peter's shame? What does that teach you about how he wants to deal with yours?