

The Grace of Reinstatement

A Savior of Grace

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Bible Text: John 21:1-19

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Do you know what we need? We need a little controversy. What do you think? How about we stir up a little controversy so I want to ask you a few questions. Are you ready for this? Should Pete Rose be reinstated to baseball? Let's just get that settled right here, right now. You know who Pete Rose is, right? Charlie Hustle? Played major league baseball from 1963-1986, then managed until 1989. And regardless, by the way, of how you would answer the question of his reinstatement or not, I think everybody would agree he had an amazing career. Absolutely amazing. He's still the all-time major league leader in hits, in games played, in at bats and singles and outs. He won 3 World Series rings. Three of them. Three batting titles. One MVP award. Two Gold Gloves. The Rookie of the Year. He made 17 All Star appearances. Did you know that? In an unequaled 5 different positions. That's right: second base, left field, right field, third base and first base. Wow. But there's always a but, isn't there? He admitted to gambling on baseball as a player and as a manager and agreed to permanent ineligibility from baseball which means he could never be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. You probably know that in 1992 and on several occasions since then, he's applied for reinstatement. What do you think about that? Should a person like Pete Rose ever be reinstated to baseball?

Now, this next one might be a bit harder. What about Lance Armstrong? Armstrong, too, an incredible athletic career: 7 consecutive Tour de France titles. He started competing as a triathlete at age 16. He won events all over the world. At one point in his career, diagnosed with a potentially fatal form of cancer. He survived that and then returned to competitive cycling. Some of you might remember watching some of those Tour de France and just how exciting those finishes were. Unbelievable athletic accomplishments. But, there's always a but. In 2012, a US ADA investigation concluded that he had used performance enhancing drugs throughout his entire career. In fact, here's exactly what they said, I quote, "It was the most sophisticated professionalized successful doping program that sport has ever seen," and as a result, he has been banned from competing in all sports which follow, not just cycling, all sports, which follow the World Antidoping Agency code as well as being stripped of all 7 of his Tour de France titles. What do you think about that? He can't compete in any of those sports again. No hope of ever being reinstated.

Or there is Adrian Peterson, another incredible athlete. No doubt about that. I mean, all of these stories share that trait in common, for sure. He played his college football at Oklahoma. Set the NCAA freshman rushing record, 1,925 yards as a true freshman. He was a unanimous first team All American. Became the first freshman to finish as the runner up in the Heisman Trophy balloting. Then he went to the NFL, had a great career. Set an NFL record for most rushing yards in a single game, 296. Named the NFL offensive Rookie of the Year. Awarded the MVP award for his performance in the Pro Bowl that year. Became the fifth player in NFL history to have more than 3,000 yards during his first 2 seasons. On and on and on. 2012, the NFL MVP Award. Became the third fastest player to reach 10,000 rushing yards in NFL history. But, did I mention there's always a but? Indicted for beating his four year old son with what he called a switch causing significant injuries and may never play football again.

Now, we could add to the list for a long time, couldn't we? And as I said, I'm sure we could get a very lively conversation going about whether any of those athletes should ever be reinstated to anything ever again but here's the question I would pose to all of us, you see, I didn't really come here to talk about them, I came here to talk about you and me. So when we compare ourselves to the perfect holiness of God, are we more like the Lord or more like these athletes? And we're not taking positions on what should happen to each of them so if you're crafting an email in your head right now that you're going to send to me about the reinstatement of Pete Rose, please don't. Just don't. So I'm not taking a position on what should happen to each of them, those are complicated questions. I'm asking you what should happen to us and what can happen to us?

With that in mind, please open your Bible to John 21. That's on page 90 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you. Our theme this year is "Finding Grace," taken from Hebrews 4:16 which says, "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need." Well, during the Easter season we've been focusing this year on the last days of Christ on earth as recorded in the Gospel of John and we're thinking together about our Savior of grace and how does that fit into the question of our reinstatement and we've been seeing in passage after passage after passage that Jesus is full of grace. Aren't you glad for a Savior like that? That's the one that we came to worship this morning, the risen Savior who is full of grace. By the way, starting next week we're going to be doing a series for the next 7 on a family of grace and I would encourage you to just note the list of topics that are going to be discussed. How do we communicate together with grace in our families? How do we solve conflicts in our families with grace? etc, etc. Bring a friend to come along with you as we talk about: how does our Savior of grace impact the way we relate to our families. But this morning we want to see how the Gospel of John ends. It's all about grace.

John 21, beginning in verse 1, "After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested Himself in this way. Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, 'I am going fishing.'" I'm sick of this hot mess. I am going fishing. "They said to him, 'We will also come with

you.' They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught," surprise, surprise, surprise, huh? "nothing. But when the day was now breaking." Are you putting yourself in this situation? Can you smell the water? Can you feel the frustration of not catching a thing? Can you see the sun start to come up?

"But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. So Jesus said to them, 'Children, you do not have any fish, do you?'" I wonder if Christ might want to tenderly say that to some of us today? "'Children, you don't have any fish, do you?' They answered Him, 'No.' And He said to them, 'Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch.' So they cast," picture this, "and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved," that would be John, "said to Peter, 'It is the Lord.' So when Simon Peter," the failure, the one who was in great need of reinstatement, "So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was clothed for work), and threw himself into the sea. But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish. So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish which you have now caught.'" That's a fascinating detail, I think.

"Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn." Another incredible detail. "Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.'" Can you imagine a breakfast that Jesus made? That beats Cracker Barrel, folks, as much as you might like their biscuits and gravy down there. "'Come and have breakfast.' None of the disciples ventured to question Him, 'Who are You?' knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead. So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?'" These fish. "He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Tend My lambs.' He said to him again a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Shepherd My sheep.' He said to him the third time," I wonder why he said it 3 times? "He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, 'Do you love Me?' And he said to Him, 'Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend My sheep.'"

Friend, we're talking this morning about the grace of reinstatement and with the time we have remaining, let's think about 3 lessons from the restoration of Peter. I don't know for sure what ought to happen to Pete Rose and Lance Armstrong, etc. I know what happened to Peter and I know it is really, really good news.

Three lessons from the restoration of Peter. It starts right here. Sometimes you have to come to the end of yourself before you see the need of forgiveness. Do you realize that? That's where you have to be. Now, events never occur in a vacuum. I believe that Peter would not have been ready for this kind of interchange. He would not have been ready to

acknowledge what he acknowledged were it not for what had already occurred. So think about the context of all of this: where did we get and what had occurred to bring us to this breakfast? Well, if you are new to studying the Bible, you may not know that Peter's former occupation was that of a commercial fisherman. In fact, many of the disciples, that's what they had done. And you also may know this: that when Christ originally called Peter, it was in a very similar situation where they had been out all night and they caught nothing. Do you remember that? It's in Luke 5 which tells us that they had been fishing all night, now they're cleaning their nets. Jesus had been teaching a group of people on the shore but because the group had gotten so large, Jesus asked Peter if he would take him out in the boat so that Jesus would have a broader audience to which to speak and then when he was done feeding his lambs, when he was done feeding his sheep, he asked Peter to take him out into the deep water and to let your nets down for a catch. And you can hear Peter in his mind just saying, "Typical preacher. Thinks he knows everything about everything. You don't fish at this time of the day. You don't fish in the deep water. This is going to be an utter waste of time," but just to humor the Lord, he did it.

What happened back at the initial call of Peter? Well, here's what it was, when they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish and their nets began to break so they signaled to their partners on the other boat for them to come and help them. They came, filled both of the boats so that they began to sink. Do you remember how Peter responded to that? Here's what he said, rightly, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." He got that right, acknowledging Christ to be his Lord twice in the span of 10 or 12 words. Do you remember what Jesus said to that? He said, "Don't fear for now on you will be catching men." That was a common phrase in that day but the point was: "The things that I have been teaching on the seashore, you're now going to be part of that team to give truth to others, to feed the word of God to others just as I have done. You are now going to be a fisher of men." And how did Peter and his friends respond? A very important detail. The Scripture says, "When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him." They burned their bridges. Not because there was anything wrong with being a commercial fisherman but Christ had clearly called them to something else. So it's no accident that Jesus' breakfast of choice was fish. "Do you love me more than these?"

Now, there are other aspects of the context that come into play in this story. You remember in the upper room just before Jesus had gone to the cross, he explained to the disciples that they would all fall away, that they would all desert him. What was it that Peter said? "Though the rest of these guys will fall away, I will not." It wasn't long after that that Jesus asked in the garden of Gethsemane for them to pray with him and Peter did what? Fell asleep. Then he failed in the garden by becoming enraged and cutting off the ear of one of the soldiers. Are you getting the context? Failure. Failure. Failure. Failure. Then, of course, he denied the Lord, how many times? Three times. Then on Easter morning when he heard the initial report that the tomb was empty, what did he conclude? He said, "That is utter nonsense," and then he even went to the tomb himself with John and went away not yet believing. Then the first women arrived at the tomb. They were told by the angels to get a message back to the disciples, "Meet the Lord at the Sea of

Galilee." Did Peter do that? Nope. They hid out. Then Jesus himself appeared to them and said, "Get up to the Sea of Galilee," and so finally Peter and the rest of the disciples go up there and guess what? Jesus isn't there and it was in that context that Peter said, "I'm going fishing. I'm quitting this hot mess. I'm going fishing."

One of the questions that's often discussed about that part of the story is, "Are you saying it's wrong?" You understand, this wasn't sportfishing. They weren't on vacation. They weren't saying, "Hey, let's go and get some walleye." We're not talking about that. They had nets. They were returning in one way or another to their former life and occupation. And I think we have to acknowledge the text doesn't say for sure that they were wrong to go fishing but we do know this: Christ's original call involved Peter leaving those nets and becoming a fisher of men. He's certainly not fulfilling the call that he had been given by God. Why not? Why not? Well, don't know for sure but there is this huge issue hanging over him: he had failed. He had failed repeatedly. He had failed miserably. Can any of us relate to that? And the question before the house now was: could a person like that ever be reinstated?

Another observation we could make is: certainly no hint of prayer or study or consideration of the will of God. This just appears to be another one of those examples of Peter making an impulsive decision, "Enough of this guilt. Enough of this failure. Enough of this uncertainty. Enough of this messing up. I'm out of here and anybody who wants to come with me can come."

A third strong reason to believe that Peter's actions were displeasing to God: it certainly wasn't working so well. Verse 3 tolls a bell that too many fishermen have heard all too often, huh? They toiled all night and they caught nothing. Have you ever been there? And I'm not saying, by the way, that if you're living for God you'll always catch fish. My son would rise up and say, "That ain't true, dad." That things will always go your way but there's clearly a contrast in this passage, huh? Between receiving God's blessings and not receiving God's blessings and at this point in the story, they are in the not category. They are in the not category. Of course, that was gently pointed out by Jesus calling to them from the shore and saying, "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" I wonder if Jesus would want to say that to anyone who's going to be hearing this message today? Not in harsh judgment but just pointing out a fact that is so very, very obvious about the path you might be on. "Children, you don't have any fish, do you? That approach is not working very well."

Does anybody here think all this happened by accident? I mean, what an unusual coincidence: professional fisherman didn't catch a thing back in Luke 5 when they are first called to follow Christ and now on this particular night, they don't catch anything again. Dumb luck, huh? Dumb luck. Well, here's the principle: emptiness is often the vehicle God uses to draw people to himself. You might say, "I feel empty right now, too. I feel empty in my marriage. I feel empty with my estrangement from some person. I feel empty at my job. I feel empty at some habit that has me bound up. I feel empty and empty in whatever it might be." Friends, emptiness is often the vehicle God uses to draw people to himself. That's why God has built the principle of cause and effect into his

world. That's why we would read things like Galatians 6:7, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap." And as Proverbs says, "The way of the transgressor, it leads to emptiness."

"Children, you don't have any fish, do you?" Why is that? Why is emptiness part of God's cause and effect for steps that we take that are going away from the Lord and his will? Why? Well, it's to help us see our need for forgiveness. It's to help bring us to a point of repentance. God designed human beings to experience and enjoy a personal relationship with him that's intimate, that's as marvelous as the relationship between a vine and its branches. But sin separates us from all of that. It takes us off track. We're fooled into believing that we are stronger than we really are or that we're smarter than we really are or more self-sufficient than we really are. It's like the psalmist said, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain that build it." And you might be here this morning and would say, "I feel like I'm laboring in vain." Maybe it's because the Lord's not building the house.

"Children, you don't have any fish, do you?" "Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman keeps awake in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, To retire late, To eat the bread of painful labors; For He gives to His beloved even in his sleep." Now friends, I really believe this: sometimes the most gracious thing God can do for you is to not allow your steps away from him or your steps away from his will to work.

"Children, you don't have any fish, do you?" This, by the way, gets at a significant aspect of our community-based outreach ministry. Why are we constantly trying to love the people in our town? Why are we trying to make all sorts of resources available? Why are we trying to get to know our neighbors in every possible way we can? Here's why: to be ready with the compassion and truth of Christ when someone's net is empty. Do you remember right at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, right at the very beginning? He's asked to read a particular passage from the Old Testament and he selects Isaiah 61:1 where he says, "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because He anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor."

"Children, you don't have any fish, do you?" "He sent me to proclaim release to the captives."

Children, you don't have any fish, do you?" "And recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed and proclaim the favorable year of the Lord." And do you remember what happened next in that text? The Bible says he sat down and then he said, "Today the Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." What I'm saying is: Jesus is in the business of helping people who come to the place of realizing that their nets are really empty. Really empty.

Well, where does that take us next logically? The good news is God stands ready to show you his power to forgive. I realize right about now you might say, "Well, Happy Easter to you too, Pastor Viars. I mean, I came here to be built up. I came up for some

encouragement. I came here for some hope and you just reminded me how empty things can be." Whoa, whoa, whoa, remember this: the nets did not stay empty. Do you realize that? The nets did not stay empty, not by a long shot. And the principle is: success is often closer than you realize. I love this little quote by Warren Wiersbe who said, "The difference between success and failure was the width of the ship." Amen to that, huh? We're never far from success when we permit Jesus to be the one who is giving the orders.

The Lord wasn't there simply to remind them that life without him did not work, he was there to offer them a better alternative. "Cast your net on the other side of the boat." I wonder how many people God might want to say that to this morning, too? "Cast your net like on the other side of the boat." So they cast and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of the fish. Verse 11 tells us that later when they finally got to the land, they counted them and they were how many? 153 great fish. By the way, that's another one of the reasons that we believe the Bible is the literal word of God because of all of those kinds of details. 153 of them and you also know that fishermen were involved. Why? Because they were sure you knew how big they were. Right? 153 great, great fish.

What's the lesson there? Friend, God loves to deal in abundance and I realize you might say, "Well, you don't understand how messed up my life is." God still deals in abundance. Or somebody else might say about our ministry philosophy of trying to love everybody in our town and trying to put as many resources out there to make our town a better place just to show the love of Christ to persons regardless of where they are, regardless of what they believe. We're just trying to love on everybody in this town and I realize some look at us and say, "Are you crazy? Do you realize how dysfunctional this culture is and on purpose you are following a ministry philosophy that extends an open welcome to anybody from the community regardless of how much they have messed up?" Well, here's what we believe about that: "Where sin abounds, grace does much more abound." Friends, God deals in abundance. We're not talking about a little fish, we're talking about the possibility of 153 whoppers here. By the way, when you're out at the restaurant later on today, please don't tell somebody if they ask you, "Well, what did you talk about in church?" "Well, we talked about fish. We talked about a lot of fish." No, we talked about a lot of grace. God loves to deal in abundance. Abundant grace.

Not only that, abundant strength which is why Paul would say, "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly," there's our word, *abbondanza*, I need to get a pizza word in here. "More abundantly beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works within us."

Abundant grace. Abundant strength. And abundant life. "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy, I came that they might have life and have it abundantly." Here's the point: Jesus wanted Peter to understand that there was something in this picture far bigger than his failure, it was the marvelous grace of Christ. And that's the beauty of the heinous price that had to be paid on the cross of Calvary because when a bill is paid that completely and that sufficiently, there's plenty of grace to go around.

Now, please note this: God allows you and he calls you to do your part in this forgiveness process, in this repentance process, in this reinstatement process. You say, "What do you mean by that?" Well, they still had to cast their nets. They still had to do what Jesus said. They still had to haul the fish in. And isn't it an amazing detail that even though Jesus already had the breakfast cooking when they got to the shore, he still says to them in verse 11, "Bring some of the fish which you have now caught." Isn't that fascinating? It's not like Jesus was embarrassed because he didn't realize so many people were coming. "I thought there were going to be 6 of you and now there are 10." But what an incredible balance between divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

Now, this is serious now: what does that mean for the forgiveness process? The restoration process? The reinstatement process? I'm quite sure and I'm so glad that this is true, that there will be a number of men and women who will listen to this message today and you don't know that you know that you know that you're on your way to heaven. You don't have yet the personal relationship with God that we're talking about in this text. Do you realize that we prayed that you would come? We're glad that you're here but, friends, you're really at a point of decision. If you would say, "I have been trying to live my life apart from the Lord and I start looking at my relationships or I start looking at the condition of my soul or I start looking at some other aspect of my life and I do recognize the emptiness," here's what's required to get out of that: you have to repent. You have to turn around. In other words, you have to admit your sin. You have to admit your need. And then you turn to Christ in hands that are open, receiving a gift that you cannot earn on your own. And I'm going to tell you, for many Americans, that's the point right there. "I don't want to admit there's anything wrong with me. I don't want to admit that my nets are empty and I certainly don't want to admit that my nets are empty because of anything that I have done." There's no way to have new life in Christ unless you're willing to repent.

We tried to make that really clear in the Passion Play. I'm so glad for the many men and women who served so faithfully in the Passion Play. I recognize a number of you are just so tired right now. You're exhausted. It's an exhausted kind of tired but there is a satisfaction that comes with seeing a number of men and women place their faith and trust in Christ and I'm so glad for that. But it was interesting as I was greeting people on the street after the Passion Play and I'm not saying I can read someone's mind. I'm not saying that at all but there was at least a person or 2, in fact, one follow wouldn't even shake my hand. There was at least a person or 2 who was a little bit upset apparently about the message of the Passion Play. Do you know what that is? That's conviction. That's conviction because someone is having to say, "Are you telling me I have to admit my sin? Are you telling me I have to admit that there's something wrong with me? Are you telling me that I can't save myself? Are you telling me that I have to humble myself and receive a gift from a crucified Savior that I can't earn on my own?" Yes. Yes. Yes. And yes. That is the point of repentance and God has done his part but then he calls you to acknowledge, "My nets are empty." "Children, you don't have any fish, do you?" And then to actually do something, cast your net on the other side of the boat.

Friend, listen, here's the thing, I've been in this business a long time: some folks are so incredibly stubborn they won't do their part. Do you know what they need? They need a sweet pastor like me to tell them they ought to... welcome to "I'm sweet." The question is: are you still going to be, I'm off my notes. I can't believe it came out there. Friend, I want to urge you while you have the opportunity to do so to acknowledge your need and I am glad, I am so glad that a number of men and women have already done that through the Passion Play. Do you realize what that means? Folks in this community are waking up today celebrating their first Easter as followers of Christ because they know that they know that they know that they're on their way to heaven. But if you're not there yet, why not acknowledge your need and place your faith and trust in Christ right now? And if you just did that, can I ask you, this is going to be hard for you: whoever brought you to church, would you tell them that you did that? Because some of you are so stubborn, have I mentioned that already? That you wouldn't even tell someone who brought you and I'll tell you, it will make the best Easter in the world for a loved one to know that you have cast your net on the other side of the boat, that you have placed your faith and trust in Christ.

Now, Christian friend, are you in a particular situation in need of forgiveness? You see, you might be displeasing God in some particular way and in that sense your nets are empty. Your relationship is estranged. Your direction is the wrong way and you know it and everybody knows it. You see, followers of Christ can be pretty stubborn too, huh? Why are you staring at me? Followers of Christ can be pretty stubborn too in a particular situation. Listen, here's a verse, Proverbs 28:13, "He who covers his sin shall not prosper." Shall not prosper. "But he who confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy."

I love reinstatement. I love restoration. But it has to be preceded by repentance and I'm not just talking about words of repentance, I'm talking about deeds of repentance. And I'll tell you, I've seen folks who absolutely refused to acknowledge that they were wrong. Absolutely refused to change their narrative from blaming their life on everybody else. Some people are like a dog with a sweat sock in its mouth. Do you know what I mean by that? And I'm not talking about you as a dog right now, I'm talking about that other guy next to you. But I'm just saying, you've seen dogs, right, with a sweat sock and it doesn't even have to be clean. It can be a dirty sweat sock you've been wearing for a week. I know you may not do that but a dirty old, smelly sweat sock, you give it to a dog, a dog starts ripping the thing. He's got to have it. He will not release it from his mouth. Some dogs, you can pick them right up off the ground and they absolutely will not release that dirty sweat sock from their mouth and for some people that's their narrative. "It's your fault. It's your fault. It's your fault. I didn't do anything wrong." You don't get to the point of restoration without repentance and I would want to love you as your pastor because I have seen where the road of no repentance leads and I would call upon you today, "Cast your net on the other side of the boat." I would encourage you to acknowledge any way that you have sinned against God or another person and put down your arms.

Then you have to get to the point of getting the help you need to change and that's why we have a counseling ministry here. We'd be more than happy to help you get on the right road to what does it look like to have an abundant life? What does it look like to get that

relationship restored? There are also a number of classes that we're going to be teaching on Wednesday nights as part of our Faith Community Institute. All of that is just about trying to help individuals enjoy the abundance that there is in Christ.

I realize you might say, "Well, but Jesus isn't filling people's nets with fish anymore literally." He's doing it spiritually. One of the things I love about this particular year and I don't know why God has chosen to do it this way but we have seen a number of men and women place their faith and trust in Christ this year. It's just been amazing. Week after week after week through all kinds of various ministries, God is helping people get to the place where they'll cast their net on the other side of the boat.

You also may be in a situation and you may not even know it but just because of the way you're living, your rejoicing in who Christ is and you are finding your joy and your satisfaction in him, you may be having an impact on somebody else who is hurting and you wouldn't even know it. It probably doesn't surprise you to know that I get a lot of email in my line of work. Sometimes my phone is just smoking and that's alright. That's alright, that's part of it. I got one yesterday, it was fascinating. It said, "Dear Pastor Viars," at least there was a dear. That was a bit of a good sign. "Dear Pastor Viars," then this person said, "yesterday," he said, "I lost my wife of 58 years on January 9." Now, think about that. Then he said, "Your contribution to the grief share program is truly appreciated by me. Thanks for your prayers." I hadn't even thought about that in a long time. You maybe heard of grief share and divorce care. It's a couple of videos that are shown in churches around the US. They flew me and a bunch of other people around to shoot some video and then they crafted it into these videos: grief share and divorce care. I've never watched the videos. I have them in my office but I've never watched the things but apparently this man did and saw them and was helped. Then he said, "Today, I know it's holy week and that you're extremely busy but for some reason this morning during my quiet time I felt that you needed my prayers and support. You have them. May God bless you today. May God fill you with the Holy Spirit." Then he said, "Tomorrow is Easter. Thank God for the gift of this day. As you said," and apparently I said this in the video, "this may be a bad chapter but it's not the last chapter." You see, there's a guy in the middle of incredible heartache, can you think of it? Going through your first Easter without your honey of 58 years. And I realize some of you can imagine what that is like. And he's doing his part to find God's abundance.

Well, where does this story end? Forgiven people can still have a place in the plan and program of God. The tenderness of this part of the passage is so instructive, "Come and dine," Jesus says to Peter. Warren Wiersbe said it like this, "How loving of Jesus to feed Peter before he'd dealt with his spiritual needs. He gave Peter opportunity to dry off and to get warm, to satisfy his hunger, to enjoy personal fellowship. This is a good example for us to follow as we care for God's people. Certainly the spiritual is more important than the physical but caring for the physical can prepare the way for spiritual ministry. Our Lord does not so emphasize the soul that he neglects the body."

Then after breakfast Jesus and Peter have to have a conversation because what Peter did cannot be ignored. There has to be some kind of repentance and restoration so the Lord

asks him 3 times, "Simon, do you love me?" I wonder why he asked him that 3 times? Because Peter had denied him 3 times. And if you've studied all this before, you probably know that although the original conversation would have been in Aramaic, we have it recorded for us in Greek and it's true that Jesus used a stronger word for love the first 2 times he asked, agape or agapao, Peter responded in a lesser form of love, phileo, more of a friendship love.

You also may know that Jesus said regarding his ministry, "Feed my sheep," and then, "Feed my lambs." We can make observations about the differences if we had time but here's the main emphasis: ultimately Peter had to come back to his first love because his lapses had been because of a lack of love and there wouldn't be any future ministry that was effective unless it was built on a foundation of love for Christ. And friend, I would just ask you on this Easter morning: are you cultivating a growing intimacy, are you cultivating a growing authenticity, are you cultivating greater love for your Savior?

Then he is restored to ministry. "Feed my lambs. Feed my sheep." Thank God that his grace includes the opportunity of usefulness regardless of your past and it's only going to be a few days from now, the day of Pentecost, that one of the disciples is going to be given the opportunity to preach the message of the resurrection and who is that? It's Peter and he preaches a marvelous message. He has been reinstated. A marvelous message and 3,000, not 153 fish, 3,000 men and women place their faith and trust in Christ and the church is born. You might say, "But Steve, I just can't stop forgetting about all my failure." One of my pastor friends posted this on Facebook this week. He said, quoting Martin Luther, "When the devil throws your sins in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell, tell him this, 'I admit I deserve death and hell. What of it? For I know one who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God, and where he is, there I may be also.'"

So friends, we're going to leave the reinstatement of Pete Rose and Lance Armstrong and Adrian Peterson to other people, right? Although I'll tell you: the other day I looked on my phone and on my Facebook page there was actually a picture of Rose. I couldn't believe it and it said, "Reinstated, I never thought I'd see this day." I thought, "I can't believe this, I just prepared a sermon on this before I left town on Tuesday and now he's been reinstated. I'm going to have to adjust my sermon." Until I realized that had been sent out on April Fool's Day so we're right back to where we were. We'll leave that to people more acquainted with the facts and the law but when it comes to people like you and me, we'll leave that to the Savior of grace, huh?

If you've never trusted Christ, why not do it today? Christian friend, if you've been heading the wrong way, why not repent? Why not cast your net on the other side of the boat? And if you have done those things but you're sitting on the sidelines, it's time for you to be reinstated. It's time for you to get back in the game.

Let's stand together for prayer, shall we?

Father in heaven, thank you for the opportunity to consider this marvelous story and we bow at the feet of our Savior of Grace. And Lord, I pray that wherever we are spiritually in this process, I pray that we would take the next step toward you in humble acknowledgment and thanks for who you are. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.