

Pastor Tom Mortenson

Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

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Resurrection Sunday - Jesus Heals and Restores

Selected Scriptures

Prayer: *Father God, we just praise you and thank you for the incredible gift that we are celebrating this Easter. Lord, we just thank you because we can truly say that up from the grave you arose and it's changed our lives forever. We praise you and thank you for that gift. And Father, today at this part of the service we want to open up your book, we want to look into it, and again treat it as the gift that it is, Lord, you've given us this book to have insight into your heart, your thoughts, your mind. And so we pray that your Holy Spirit would accompany us, because it's your Spirit alone who makes this make sense. So we pray for your Spirit's accompaniment as we look into your book, and we pray this would be of permanent value. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, today is the day that we celebrate the greatest miracle that ever took place. Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, knowingly and obediently submitted himself to humiliation, torture and execution at the hands of the Jewish religious community and the Roman state. Jesus was God in the flesh come down from heaven itself to rescue

and ransom his sheep by offering up his perfect life on the cross as a substitute for our imperfection. Easter is the day we celebrate that after three days, Jesus having conquered death itself, rose from the grave. Now we've looked at Easter from many, many different angles over the years and this morning I want to look at Jesus not only as our sin bearer but also as the architect of our lives. And Easter gives us the opportunity to see Jesus shaping and molding his sheep to advance his kingdom even as he is dying for those very same sheep.

At the start of his public ministry, Jesus is gathering these twelve people around him that by most standards are absolutely unequipped and unqualified for the task that Jesus has given them. That's by design. Jesus takes ignorant fishermen and greedy tax collectors and an assortment of other misfits and he tells them that it's by the power of God they are going to turn the world upside down. And so we follow his ministry and we follow it across the span of three years and at the end of those three years, we see Jesus beginning to tell his disciples what he had come to earth for, and it wasn't to teach, it wasn't to lead, it wasn't even to be some kind of example for others to follow. He tells them he has come as the Lamb of God to lay down his life for the sins of his sheep. And even though he has repeatedly explained to his disciples precisely what is going to happen, we all know that when

push came to shove, all of his disciples deserted him.

What I want to focus in on this morning is what Jesus was doing in the life of one of those disciples and that would be Peter. I want us to see how Jesus ministered to Peter as a broken vessel, because all of us, like Peter, are broken vessels, and every one of us has a role to play just like Peter did in advancing God's kingdom. See, Jesus had his eyes on Peter right from the start. And as he guided him and walked him through the many hills and valleys in Peter's own ministry, I want us to understand that God right now has his eyes specifically on you. And Jesus Christ still intends to do with us what he did with Peter. *Romans 8:28* tells us that *all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose*. A look into Peter's life and his interactions with Jesus will demonstrate that's exactly what Jesus worked into Peter's life. God used the good, the bad, and even the ugly in Peter's life to work together for his good and for God's glory, and that's exactly what he wants to do with us.

And so we start a few days before Jesus is betrayed by Judas in the garden. Jesus has gathered his disciples for more instruction concerning his imminent crucifixion, and we see that Peter has already assumed a leadership role. The disciples are gathered around Jesus and Peter demonstrates these two opposite poles that

make him both a leader of men and a sinner in great need of forgiveness. He has on the one hand this God-given ability to see what nobody else can see about the nature of Christ and his kingdom. And at the same time he has this ego-driven propensity to play the braggart and the know-it-all. We pick up at *Matthew 16* starting at verse 13. It says: *Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."* There's Peter's God-given ability to perceive exactly who Jesus was. He goes on to say: *Then he (Jesus) strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke*

him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

See, Peter wanted nothing to do with this kingdom of God that Jesus is advancing, I mean, he wanted things his way. He wanted to see Jesus go on to some great earthly ministry as some kind of paramilitary ruler ushering this brand new golden age with Peter somewhere right in there behind him enjoying his newfound fame and power. It was an amazing juxtaposition of incredibly deep insight that was given to Peter, that Jesus was indeed the Christ, and an equally incredibly selfish shortsightedness that refused to accept just how Jesus was going to fight to advance his kingdom. Well, shortly afterwards Jesus gathers his disciples for one last supper, one last Passover celebration before he, himself, would become that Passover lamb who would take away the sins of the world. And he once again tells his disciples what's about to unfold. And Peter once again speaks out something he would soon learn to regret. It says: *And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee."* Peter answered him:

"Though they all fail away because of you, I will never fall away." Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" And all the disciples said the same. Well, we all know what happens next. Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss, Peter again acting impulsively plays the hero by striking off -- striking one of the soldiers, cutting off his ear. Jesus heals the soldier and he gently rebukes Peter and then he passively accepts his arrest at the hand of Rome. Well, the stage is now set to look at Easter from the perspective of these two different people: One is the Lord Jesus Christ and the other is Peter.

So first we look at Jesus. Jesus was unwavering in his determination to deal a fatal blow to the kingdom of darkness and its claim on all of us who were born now with the curse of Adam. Some call it original sin, some simply refer to it as "the fall," but it's the imperfection of Adam that causes each of us as sons and daughters of Adam to be born into a legacy of imperfection. Because Adam's sin was passed on to each and every one of his offspring, we are all born fallen. We are all born no longer perfect. And so the enemy now has a claim on each of us as none of us have the perfection necessary to be fit for heaven. Jesus was God in the flesh come to earth to pay the price of that

imperfection and so ransom his sheep by substituting his perfection and righteousness for our imperfection and sin. By faith in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, we could now have our perfection restored by appropriating by faith the perfection, not of us, but of Him. We could now stand before God as perfect not on the basis of our own birth or conduct but on the basis of the righteousness that Jesus has given us as a gift of faith. When Jesus rose from the dead on Easter Sunday, he had proven to the entire universe that his life and his death were both flawless and that his sacrifice on our behalf was accepted by God whose justice had to be perfect and was accepted as payment in full for our imperfection. As the scripture says: *Having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them.* That's Jesus.

So now we turn our attention to Peter. And what I want us to see in this particular Easter story is not only did Jesus have complete mastery over all of the attempts of the enemy to sidetrack him from his ministry of being that sacrificial lamb, but that Jesus even in the midst of his passion and through to his resurrection, never lost sight of the role that he had of dying for our sins while also instructing and preparing Peter and the rest of the disciples for

the ministry of advancing the kingdom. What I really want us to see is how this principle of Romans 8:28 applies even here at the time of Christ's crucifixion. Again *Romans 8:28* says: *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose.* There's no doubt, there's no doubt whatsoever that Peter was called according to God's purpose, and there's also no doubt that God through Christ did indeed work all things, all things, even including Peter's failings and sins, together for good. Let's face it, Peter blew up and Christ put him back together again. As we follow the story we see Peter renewed, restored, and even rebuked by his master who's working all things together for his good, even as Jesus is being tried, tortured, and executed.

So we start this journey of restoration on the very night that Jesus is being tried. This is the time when Peter commits his sin of abandonment and rejection. Jesus took that terrible deed committed under the most awful of circumstances and he used it to work together for good in Peter's life. And here's how it all unfolded. We noted that -- Joni Eareckson noted that Jesus, who is the author of creation itself, who was also sustaining that same creation while he was being tried, tortured and executed, that Jesus just happened to send a high pressure system over Jerusalem that night. Well, that high pressure system dropped the

temperature enough to cause Peter to need to stand around a warming pot and put himself in a perfect position to unfold exactly what Jesus said would unfold when Peter bragged that he would never leave him. We read about three different times when Peter is confronted with an accusation that he knows Jesus, that he's an associate of Jesus, that he's a Galilean like Jesus, and we read of Peter's denials growing more and more agitated until his final denial is accompanied by curses. *Matthew 26* says: *And a little later those who stood by came up and said to Peter, "Surely you also are one of them, for your speech betrays you." Then he began to curse and swear, saying, "I do not know the man!" Immediately a rooster crowed. Luke's gospel adds: And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." So Peter went out and wept bitterly.*

I want to observe an incredibly important part of the text, and it's verse 61: *Then the Lord turned and looked at Peter, because that look, that look changed the course of Peter's life. You know, if you were a movie director trying to set up a scene, imagine how many different parts would have to be perfectly synchronized in order to have Peter and Jesus lock eyes the minute that Peter denies Jesus for the third time. Just think about what you'd have to do. First you'd have to drag Peter to a place where he'd be in*

a direct line of sight with Jesus. You'd have to line up a rooster and get him to crow perfectly on cue. You'd also have to gather a cast of ne'er-do-wells to pepper Peter with all kinds of accusations, enough to make him explode at just the right moment when Jesus just happened to be staring in a building where he's being tortured out a window directly in Peter's line of sight. Try doing that by chance. Peter's denial and Jesus' silent response to it cut Peter to the quick. *Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times."* So Peter went out and wept bitterly.

What I want us to understand is Peter is you and me. Ask yourself have I ever in thought, word, or deed denied my Lord? Well, if your answer is no, you better add to it violating the ninth commandment because that's the one against lying. See, there's a part of Peter's denial that's in every single one of us, and whether it's keeping silent when we hear the name of our Savior getting trashed or saying things that we know we shouldn't be saying or simply being afraid to take the risk of sharing the gospel when you know God is telling you to. I mean, in Peter's case, his denial came on the heels of his insistence that while others may go that route, he would never, ever deny his Lord. *Peter answered him, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away."* Peter made his boast shortly after God had

singled him out as the rock, as the leader of this group of men who God would use to build his church. And from the moment that Peter denied Christ and then looked eyes with him, Jesus had on his mind a three-fold plan to recall, restore, and rebuke Peter as the head of his infant church. It all started with this piercing, crushing look from Jesus, and from the moment of the resurrection forward Jesus never stopped thinking about how he was going to minister his forgiveness to Peter.

It goes first to the resurrection. Mary Magdalene and the women find the empty tomb and there's an angel there and he makes a passing reference to this unfinished business between Jesus and Peter as he speaks to the women. This is *Mark 16*. The angel says: *"Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples -- and Peter -- that he is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you."* See, God is already beginning to recall Peter. Now if you've ever found yourself like Peter, having sinned greatly against someone or like Jesus, having had someone sin greatly against you, you know that sin becomes the elephant in the room. You know that it's there every time you think about restoring that relationship. Well Jesus is our model here. You see, Peter sinned greatly against Jesus, abandoning him at his deepest hour of need, having bragged that

that would never happen. But now we watch the risen Lord. We watch to see how Jesus responds to Peter because Jesus is our model. And 1 Peter tells us: *For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow in his steps.* I mean it's stunning, it is absolutely amazing thinking that God in the midst of his death and resurrection is still thinking of how he can restore Peter, but it's true. The angels already started the process of singling Peter out, letting him know that he's not been pushed away, that he's still on the mind of God. We know that Peter's already seen the risen Christ because we know he's appeared to the disciples as a group but we also know there's this unfinished business between Peter and Jesus that is yet to be addressed. We can also assume that Peter at this point is struggling mightily with guilt. You know he's thrilled beyond measure that the Lord has risen, but I guarantee you at the same time he is crushed with the overwhelming weight of his denial. For years, for three years now, he's been a follower of Christ and now, now he has no idea what he is. We pick up the scripture at *John 21*. It says: *Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing."* You know when you're completely lost like Peter was, you go back to the only thing you know and for Peter, that meant fishing. And whether Peter was fishing just to

clear his head with something familiar or to return to a life that at one time made sense to him when nothing was making sense at this point, we don't know, but Peter wasn't alone. *They said to him, "We're going with you also." They went out and immediately got into the boat and that night they caught nothing.* I've been on fishing trips where everybody got skunked and it is not fun at all. My guess is this night of fishing, this night of going back to something familiar, something that at one time made sense, my guess is that night had a whole bunch of silent moments while the disciples were just trying to process a risen Lord and where their lives are going to go now.

We pick up the scripture. It says: *But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Then Jesus said to them, "Children, have you any food?" They answered him, "No." And he said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish.* I read this and I think, you know, the graciousness of Jesus Christ is staggering. Just think about it. If anyone had the absolute right to spike the football and say, "Hey, thanks for abandoning me, guys," it was Jesus. Instead he calls out to them, "Children," and the term "children" that he used there is a term of endearment. Hey, guys, how's the fishing?

Jesus knew they had gotten skunked. He also knew a little something about catching fish. See, both Jesus and Peter probably remembered the last time that the exact same situation had presented itself. It was three years earlier, Jesus was just beginning his public ministry, the disciples are still raw recruits far more familiar with fishing than they are with being followers of Jesus. These are folks that had given up being fishers of fish and were now becoming fishers of men. And so they're working with Jesus and he's preaching to a crowd so large that he has to be in a boat. So he's in a boat and the disciples are in the same boat, then suddenly Jesus gives Peter this very bizarre command: *He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."* This is bizarre and Simon knew it was so. Simon and the other fishermen were pros, and as pros they knew two things for certain: One, you never, never fish during the heat of the day. You fish at night. And number two, you don't fish where Jesus had instructed him to go fish. I mean when it came to fishing, Jesus was a preacher, he was a carpenter, he was certainly not a fisherman, and yet here he is telling them what to do. *But Simon answered and said to him, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at your word I will let down the net."* And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled

both the boats, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" Now Peter instantly knew this was no ordinary catch, and you see Peter had that spiritual awareness to understand that he was in the presence of someone who was far more than a carpenter or a fisherman. Peter knew even back then that this man was holy and he was not. Fast forward three years. Jesus has just risen from the dead. Peter is still smarting from his abandonment of Jesus and he's back out on the very same lake with the very same lack of fish he had at the very first. And that's when he hears this familiar voice calling out, telling him once again where to find the fish, saying: *"Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some."*

Again we pick up. It says: *Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!"* Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he had removed it) and plunged into the sea. But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far from land, but about two hundred cubits), dragging the net with the fish. Then, as soon as they had come to the land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, *"Come and eat breakfast."* Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, *"Who are you?"* -- knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then came and took

the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish. Again, I'm speaking about Jesus as our model here. Understand what's going on here. First he calls Peter. Remember Jesus is the offended party here. I mean he doesn't do what I would do, I mean, sit back and wait for these ne'er-do-wells to come crawling on their knees and apologize. In fact he makes the first overture. Just think about ourselves, I mean, how do we respond when someone sins against us? I mean better yet, how do we respond when we know the victory is ours as Jesus did, when we know that they know just how terribly they've treated us? How do we respond? Jesus responded by calling out to Peter. And just the way he spoke let Peter know that he wasn't there to pile drive him into the ground but to begin a conversation.

Well, next Jesus serves. I mean it's not enough that Jesus simply makes an overture. He hasn't just provided a boatload of fish for his disciples, while they're bringing the catch in, he's already finished cooking up a fish fry with bread on the side. As I was thinking about this, I was beginning to wonder, how does a post-resurrection Christ put together this fish fry? I mean prior to the cross and the resurrection, I would have expected that Jesus, having given up all of the prerogatives as God, well, what would he have done? He would have first had to gather the wood, he would have had to have gone fishing, he would've gone through the

laborious process of getting a fire started and then gutting and cleaning the fish to prepare them and cook them, well that was all pre resurrection. I just wondered if post resurrection Jesus said, "Cooked fish, appear!" That side of bread as well. Anyway, the point is Jesus called Peter and the disciples and then he served them and he served them extravagantly. And again, I can't help but imagine what that dinner must have been like. I'm sure the food was great but my guess is the atmosphere was a little tense. Jesus was about to address the elephant in the room.

I frequently counsel people who are dealing with elephants, and I often tell them to do what is intensely counterintuitive. I tell them to do what Jesus did. Reach out to your adversary. Try to think of a way that you can serve that person. And you know, as I broach the subject, folks often give me that "Are you out of your mind?" look. And I explain to them that since birth, you know, all of us have learned extremely well and we know it like the back of our hands, how to fight. I mean we can do that with our eyes closed. Fighting back is what everyone expects. But I tell them we have no defenses for somebody who comes into the ring with his hands down offering to serve us. I tell folks it's absolutely baffling to people if you act that way because they just don't know how to respond, and I admit, sometimes they respond very poorly. Many people even prefer duking it out in full fight mode because

that's what they're used to, and believe it or not, that's what they're comfortable with. When you approach somebody and you're eager for reconciliation and you're willing to serve, they just don't know what to do. It's exactly what Jesus did with his disciples. And so having served Peter, it's now time to address this elephant that is still in the room, and we pick up the scripture at *John 21*. It says: *So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs."*

Now there's an interplay that takes place here between Jesus and Peter that you have to really get the Greek to understand, and it has to do with the words that both of them are using in this conversation for "love." Jesus starts out by addressing Peter with his given name, he says "Simon," and it's a reflection of the old Peter and I'm sure that stung a little bit. Jesus asks Simon if he has agape love for him. And you probably know, agape love is God's love, it's the unconditional sacrificial love. Peter responds with a very different word for love. It's a much lower love, it's much more like affection. He responds with the word we call "phileo." Peter doesn't dare use the word "agape," that lofty term for love because he knows about all the bragging that he's done, especially at the expense of the other disciples. He understands he's claimed

all these others will abandon you, I will not. Jesus is now asking Peter if he still wants to make the claim that he loves him more than these other disciples. Peter knows how badly he's failed and so he can't bring himself to use that lofty term for love that Jesus had used, and instead he says, "Lord, you know that I have affection for you." And Jesus says, "*Feed my lambs.*" Jesus is affirming Peter as a shepherd. We pick up at verse 16. *He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep."* Well, Jesus ups the ante here by asking him a second time, this time without any reference to the disciples, do you have agape love for me? Well, Peter again can't bring himself to that high level of love because he knows how poorly he's failed. So again he says, Lord, you know that I have affection for you. And once again Jesus affirms him by telling him a second time, "*Tend my sheep.*"

So we pick up at verse 17: *He said to him a third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, 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, "Feed My sheep."* Now this third time Jesus drops the bar down to Peter's level, he uses Peter's word for love. He says Peter, can you at least say you have affection for me? And at this

point Peter is crushed. He's exactly where Jesus wants him to be, recognizing that on his own he is not even capable of loving his Lord like he thought he could. Peter is standing exposed before the disciples and before the probing eyes of God himself and all he can do is call on the omniscience that he knows belongs to Christ. He says, Lord, you know all things. He says you know that I dare not say what I wish I could say, that I have this agape love for you. I can only fall back on what I know you know because you know the very heart that I have and I will only say that I have affection for you. That turns out to be more than enough for Jesus and for the third time, he affirms Peter's role as a shepherd by telling him, "*Feed my sheep.*" Peter's three denials are met with Jesus's three affirmations. And those affirmations demonstrate what Jesus cared about more than anything in this, they were: "*Feed my lambs,*" "*Tend my sheep,*" "*Feed my sheep.*" Folks, that's us. He was talking to Peter about us. Jesus's goal in all of this was the care and protection of those that he had come to die for. As painful as it was, Peter needed desperately this confession, this repentance and restoration that took place publicly before the rest of the disciples in the presence of the Lord. And for the rest of his life, Peter would reflect the grace that he received from his Lord. And that impulsive, ego-driven braggart that Peter was was being put to death, and the new Peter resurrected along with his Savior was being shaped and molded by his Savior for the

task of shepherding his sheep. Once again we see *Romans 8:28* at work. God causes all things to work together for good. He's determined to use even our sin and our folly to shape and mold us into the image of his son Jesus. Not for one moment during his passion, during his crucifixion and even after his resurrection had Jesus ceased from taking the bad news of Peter's denials and making it good news for Peter.

But Jesus wasn't finished. He has one final rebuke for Peter. Jesus tells Peter in no uncertain terms that he's going to die by crucifixion. He uses the term "stretch out your hands" which was understood at that time to mean exactly that. Jesus says this: *Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish." This he spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me." Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on his breast at the supper, and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays you?" Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, "But Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow me."*

See, this last rebuke from Jesus came as the dinner is breaking up, and Peter's just gone through this excruciating time of confession and restoration. He's being assured that his task is to feed the sheep, but he can't resist this one last question. Peter sees John following the two of them and having been given this sober knowledge of his future, he points to John and he says, what about that guy? He's asking a question that all of us ask all the time. I mean it's the question that we ask when we see people who despise the name of God doing pretty darn well or maybe even people we know as fellow Christians enjoying good health and prosperity and all the other things that we might not be experiencing at the moment. So we're tempted to say to God, what about this man? I mean, he's got X, Y, and Z, and I get to get crucified? Jesus' response reminds me of something I used to say to my kids all the time when they asked me the same type of question. Many is a time I say, "Hey, what's it to you?" If you're a parent, I think you've said that more than once. But I can just picture Jesus stopping in his tracks, and he's turning around, he looks directly into Peter's eyes and he says: *"If I will that he remains until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me."* See, it's helpful to remember that Jesus treats each of us uniquely as individuals. He tells us that our names individually are written into the lamb's book of life, that even the hairs on our head are individually numbered and that the number of our days is individually recorded by God before we

were even born and that each of us has a unique name that he alone knows and will one day share with us. Would it not follow that he would not think too highly of us looking to the left or the right to this family or that individual to draw our conclusions as to what we are entitled to? Jesus says you are absolutely unique. He says there's nobody that I created in the entire world that is just like you. And my intention is to shape and mold you uniquely into the image of my Son that nobody else can bear. That's our privilege and that's also our charge. And Jesus even today 2,000 years later is doing the very same work he did in Peter's life in the lives of his people, and he does it today through his church. There's no one who can represent Jesus Christ like you can. There's no one who can represent him like I can. And Jesus very clearly wants us to understand that and to give up forever looking to the left or the right but rather instead straight ahead at him. I mean he loves you enough to have died for you. He was perfect enough to be raised from the dead, having paid for your sins and now he wants to shape and mold you uniquely into his image to advance his kingdom. If you already belong to him, take some time this Easter to reflect on the shaping and molding that he's doing right now in your life. Take comfort in the knowledge that he can take a blasphemous denial like Peter's and use it for good to shape and mold him into the image of Christ. If he can do that, he can also take my sin and my folly and use it to shape me as well. But

only as the scripture says, if we are called according to his purpose.

So that's the big question for today: Are you called according to his purpose? Jesus says this, he says: *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand."* If you don't know Jesus but if you hear him calling you, speak to me afterwards, speak to any one of the deacons, we would love to show you how the love of God can transform your life. Let's pray.

Father, what a gift Easter is to us. How incredible is it that even while you are undergoing your passion, your crucifixion, your mind was also on your disciples, your mind was also on Peter, and all of the wickedness and all of the braggadocio and all of those things that Peter had, you were shaping and molding into good because you can. And Lord, you promised to do in our lives the very same thing, all of the wickedness in our past, all of those things that we have done you say you can shape and mold into good in our lives, and so we pray for just that. Uniquely shape and mold us into your image, Lord, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.