

Sermon: Why Do We Need to Try Again?

Series: Believe and Encounter

Scripture Reading: John 21:1-14

Date: April 19, 2026

Preacher: Rev. Jasiel Hernandez Garcia



Scripture Reading:

21 After these things, Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he showed himself in this way. 2 Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin,[a] Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. 3 Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will go with you.” They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. 4 Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach, but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 Jesus said to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” They answered him, “No.” 6 He said to them, “Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. 7 That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he had taken it off, and jumped into the sea. 8 But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off. 9 When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. 10 Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” 11 So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them, and though there were so many, the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, “Who are you?” because they knew it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. 14 This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

“What else are we supposed to do?”

While our gospel story for this morning does not explicitly include these words, I can certainly imagine Peter asking himself this question.

The one who explicitly betrayed Jesus by denying him must confront his shame and guilt as he tries to lead the remaining disciples in a world that is far more violent toward those who proclaim Jesus as the “Messiah. The Lord of Lords, and King of Kings.”

Peter has a reputation throughout the gospels - he is impulsive, misguided, and often jumps to conclusions. He is eager to speak first, even if it's nonsense, only to be corrected

by Jesus later. Peter is the embodiment of a conflicted disciple: deeply devoted and yet deeply human, capable of great insight and great failure within the same breath.

Perhaps this is why Jesus chooses Peter as a leader, as someone capable of continuing Jesus' ministry to build his church. Peter is our best example of someone who is constantly moving between faith and doubt, purpose and comfort, courage and fear.

Many of us know what it's like to be like Peter.

So, we should not be surprised that our friend Peter becomes the protagonist of this resurrection encounter. Peter has seen the risen Christ, and yet it seems like this encounter with Jesus has not changed anything. He remains the "same old" Peter - doubtful, anxious, unsure about his purpose.

That doesn't make sense. Does it?

An encounter with the risen Christ should transform us. We often say on Easter Sunday that "Easter changes everything."

It should.

Easter should make such a difference in our lives that our love is no longer cautious, our purpose no longer vague, and our commitment to God and neighbor no longer conditional. It calls us out of half-measures and into a renewed way of living where grace is not something we remember once a year, but something we embody daily.

Easter should ground our hope. It should provide the courage we need to face the ever-increasing chaos and tension in our world.

Encountering the risen Christ. Experiencing Resurrection should enable a kind of transformation in our lives, so that whatever seems to keep us apart from God and one another is shattered—not merely set aside for a moment, not politely ignored, but broken open as a stone rolled away at dawn.

Friends, Easter is the moment when the quiet walls we have built - fear, resentment, shame, hatred, and indifference - begin to crack under the weight of a love that refuses to stay buried.

The resurrection of Jesus should change everything.
Our encounter with the living Christ should change us.

It should... but the truth is, transformation is not always immediate or obvious. The disciples themselves are proof of that. Peter is proof of that.

Just a few days earlier, as described in the previous chapter in John's gospel, Peter, Thomas, and the other disciples unexpectedly encountered the risen Christ in the place where they were hiding.

This wonderfully mysterious encounter reminds them that they are not alone in this new phase of ministry. Jesus is still with them. They even receive the Holy Spirit upon them as a sign of that abiding presence.

All of that should have been enough proof for Peter and the other disciples to pack their bags and resume their ministry just like in the "old days" with Jesus.

But that's not what happens next, is it?

I hear resignation in Peter's words as he says, "I am going fishing." I hear someone who remains confused. Unsure. Exhausted. Anxious.

The world around them hasn't particularly changed. In fact, things have gotten worse for them. The same powers that arrested and executed Jesus are still in place. The same threats linger in the air. There are still whispers of violence, still the fear of being recognized, still the uncertainty of what might happen if they step too far out into the open. Resurrection has happened—but Rome has not gone anywhere. The cross is empty—but the systems that put Jesus there remain fully intact.

And if we are honest, the same is true for us.

Easter does not suddenly quiet the wars that rage across nations, or heal the divisions that fracture communities, or erase the grief that sits heavy in so many hearts. We still wake up to headlines filled with violence, injustice, and deepening polarization. We still see neighbors turned against one another, truth distorted, and fear weaponized.

The world, in many ways, feels just as uncertain—perhaps even more so—than it did before.

Which means Peter's response is not as strange as we might like to think. "I am going fishing" is not just about returning to work; it is a retreat to what is known, what is manageable, what feels safe...

Like many of us, when we do not know what to do about an important decision or feel deeply overwhelmed by what is unfolding in our midst, Peter defaults to what is familiar and comforting, seeking clarity and peace by doing something that seems easy and perhaps even joyful. He goes fishing.

If you read the weekly online newsletter, you may know that I was away in New York City with my preaching cohort. We had the wonderful opportunity to meet with renowned Irish

Poet and theologian, Pádraig Ó Tuama. Our work with him was primarily centered around faith and imagination. How do we approach the biblical texts with creativity and wonder?

During our first conversation with Pádraig, he posed a question for reflection: “What has captured your imagination lately? Has that helped you find joy, hope, and resilience in such a time as this?”

If I’m honest, I struggled to answer that question. I’m not sure I’ve used my imagination lately. I’m passionate about art, cars, TV shows, and our two dogs (of course!) but I’m not sure they’ve engaged my imagination lately, much less helped me navigate today’s complexities.

I felt called out.

I have been so focused on all other sorts of things - on the chaos, and the noise, and the to-do lists, and the many responsibilities - that I haven’t had time to use my imagination.

As Pádraig often suggests in his work, the stories we tell—and the ones we dare to imagine—shape the lives we are able to live.

If we cannot imagine healing, we will struggle to pursue it. If we cannot imagine hope, we will settle for despair. If we cannot imagine reconciliation, we will continue to live with resentment.

Imagination is not only about creativity or entertainment; it is about survival. It is the capacity to see beyond what is, to hold open the possibility of what could be. Without imagination, we become trapped in the present moment as if it were permanent, as if the way things are now is the way they will always be.

What if Peter goes out fishing not to escape his calling, but to engage his imagination so that he can find the courage to lead others into the ministry Jesus has given them?

So, when Jesus appears to them in the middle of the night in our story and asks them, “Have you caught any fish?” I now hear this question actually asking, “Have you no hope? Have you no imagination? Have you no willingness to move forward?”

Jesus meets Peter in another moment of doubt. Jesus knows Peter is struggling to imagine what comes next. Jesus knows Peter is wrestling still with his faith, even after having proof that Jesus will remain with them.

Jesus knows Peter needs one more push. One more reminder. One more assurance that the God who called him despite his impulsive and doubtful faith will continue to use him as long as he can imagine that God truly can change the world.

“Cast the net on the other side.”

Try again.

Look again.

Imagine again.

The Risen Christ reminds us today that even when the world has not changed, and even when we are not sure that we have changed, Christ is still at work—calling, providing, restoring, changing...

Friends, if anything, remember this: Resurrection can still happen even if we live in a very different world from the one we imagined.

So perhaps the question is not, “What else are we supposed to do?”

Perhaps the better question is:

“What are we willing to imagine that God can do in us, through us, and among us?”

Amen.