

Mar 21 10 Lent 5 John 21:1-11

COME TOUCH HIS ROBE:

AGAINST ALL ODDS

Here we are in the 5th Sunday of Lent learning how people were touched by God. They are amazing stories, either from those in our congregation that some of you don't know well, or some of the stories from Scripture that maybe you hadn't heard about for a long time. Against all odds most of these people overcame things in their lives and saw the hand of God working miracles beyond what they could have expected. And these stories aren't the unusual but the norm. God reaches out his hand to all people in order to draw people to himself. Last week we heard Jesus say how like the snake lifted in the desert to protect the people against poisonous snake bites, he also had to be lifted up in order to save those who are bit by the snake of sin. For those who believe he is God's Son, Savior of the world, will be saved.

If you think about the things you ask God to handle then you understand some of those stories are there to encourage us to know that the God of the past is the God of today and the God of tomorrow. Against all odds God still is in control. Against all odds, Jesus still reigns.

Yesterday I did the Celebration of Life for Norm Doty. I told those of you who were here that four years ago Norm was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer.

The family knew his chances of a long life were not to be. However against all odds Norm lasted way longer than most people with this disease. And God worked miracles in his life day after day. Against all odds Norm was able to do many things and though he had his treatments he kept enjoying life one day at a time. Then he was allowed to see and hold and play with one grandson, and almost got to hold another who was born a few days after his passing. Now he rests from his labors, his life complete, his story on this earth finished his new life in heaven beginning.

We just heard Sarah Tobias' story. Many of you don't know this young lady who began attending our church, but now you do. She was another person who was willing to get up and share her story and now we have a better knowledge of Sarah Tobias.

Now we turn to our story from Scripture that will touch your life if you open your heart, mind and soul. You see it's about one of our favorite people, Peter. Today we see him after the death of Jesus and after the resurrection. Where does this take place? On the Sea of Galilee. What were they doing? They were fishing. Why? Because Jesus had died and for some reason they went back to what they were doing before they met Jesus. Hear now God's words full of grace. **READ**

JOHN 21:1-11

Can you imagine Peter and his friends fishing following Jesus' death? Earlier in John's gospel we are told Jesus appeared to the disciples in the Upper Room following his resurrection. So who knows when this took place? Maybe after that. But that is not what this story is about. It's about a chance for someone to be redeemed. Oh, we know that Jesus died to forgive the whole world when he died on the cross. But you know the disciples needed it too. I mean, in the Upper Room a week after he had appeared to them Jesus makes another appearance to the same group only this time one of the missing disciples was present. It was Thomas. Thomas was skeptical of Jesus' resurrection and said seeing believes. He wanted to see the marks of the nails on Jesus' hands, the cut in his side from the sword of the soldier before he would believe. He just wouldn't believe what his fellow disciples were telling him. After all coming back to life after being in the grave 3 days was against all odds. So when they were in the Upper Room with doors and windows shut a great light appears and out of that light is none other than Jesus. Perhaps the disciples bowed when they saw him, but his focus shifted to an unexpected Thomas as he said, "Thomas, my son, come here; I understand you have trouble believing I am alive. Put your fingers here where the nails were driven, and touch the place where the sword cut open my side. Thomas, stop doubting and believe." Thomas fell on his knees before Jesus and didn't even

touch his wounds and with tears in his eyes blurted out, “Lord, forgive my unbelief. Forgive my doubting.”

Back to Peter. They fished all night, no catch. Now comes the morning and they start to clean their nets and their boats. It’s been a long night; time to reflect on the past and think about what life would be like without Jesus and going back to the sea to make their living. But it was a lousy night. No fish! With arms tired from throwing the nets over board, back hurting from hauling them back in empty, there was discouragement among the crew. You see, they all were heartbroken because of what had happened to Jesus. And well, without their Master they were lost. But on this bright sunny morning a voice from the shore yells out and asks how they did that night. Peter, or maybe John, or maybe Thomas gave him the thumbs down sign letting the stranger on the shore know they had nothing. Then a strange call from the stranger on the shore. He said for them to cast their nets again on the right side of the boat. Perhaps more to humor the man...or maybe this guy had a better look at what he could see...the men thinking it would be nice to get a couple of fish before they went home did what the stranger suggested and against all odds many fish were caught that the boat began to tip to one side. Peter holding the rope to the net yells for help to contain the fish without losing any of them. And while they struggled to take in the large load, 153 to be exact, John looked toward the shore and saw a fire going and noticed the stranger standing on the

shore line and he realized it was the Master preparing breakfast. He nudges Peter who was concentrating on the haul and says, “Hey Peter, and look. Look at the stranger. I think it’s the Lord.” Peter keeps pulling on the rope to the net, doesn’t want to lose one fish, while barking orders for help turns slightly into the sun to see if he could see if what John said was true. Sure enough, it was the Lord. Peter yells for John to take the rope, puts a towel around his sweaty, dirty, unclothed body, jumps overboard and swims to the shore. When he gets out of the water, Jesus hands him a towel to dry off and says, “Peter, come stand by the fire and warm yourself.”

And with those words, as Yogi Berra once said “It was déjà vu all over again.” Something went off in Peter’s mind as he remembered the last time he stood by a fire warming his hands. It was the night he betrayed Jesus. Yes I said betrayed. We think it was just Judas that betrayed him. But didn’t all the disciples run off? That was bad enough. But Peter, the one who said he would never betray Jesus did. The one who said he would rather die than betray his Master ran away just like the rest. But he came out of the darkness and followed as they brought Jesus before the high priest. He hid among the crowd. But someone noticed him warming his hands and asked him, “Haven’t I seen you with this Galilean?” Peter, shook his head, “Not me sir.” Later someone else said, “You look like you aren’t from around here. Aren’t you one of this man’s disciple’s?” Again Peter in a

stronger defiant voice said, “No! You must be thinking of someone else.” While Jesus was going from one place to another Peter slips in between a couple of guys to warm his hands and tries to see what was happening. A lady looks at Peter and says, “Hey, I know you. I’ve seen you many times with this guy called Jesus. You’re one of his followers.” Peter got really irate, anger boiled up in him and fear of being caught, arrested and going on trial with Jesus blurts out “Listen, I am not a follower of this man. I don’t even know him, so get off my back.” He curses, mumbles something under his breath, and just about that time a rooster crows and Peter’s mind remembers his promise that others will turn away but he will not. Then he remembers Jesus’ words, “Peter tonight before the rooster crows three times you will deny me three times.” When the rooster crows the final time Peter’s eyes caught Jesus being led away and just at that moment, the moment the rooster crowed, the moment Peter glanced toward him, Jesus looked with a slight smile, their eyes locked together and Jesus seems to be saying, “I told you so.” Peter could not stand it so he runs brushing people aside who were in his way as tears began to flow and once outside the gates and alone he leans against the wall and pounds his fist against the wall as well as his head and tears flow like a waterfall as he hears the rooster’s crow in his mind and his own words, “I bleep, bleep, don’t even know this man.” Remembering that smile on Jesus’ face as their eyes met. It

was too much. The tears became a flood as he fell to the ground knowing he had failed his Master. How could he have done this horrible thing?

At the fire his flash back brings a chill in his body and makes him a little skittish as Jesus' smiles and says, "What's wrong Peter? Got a little chill?" And Peter nods his head saying, "Just remembering something Lord." Jesus smiles knowing Peter's heart replying, "Peter, it's okay. All is forgiven."

Friends, you know, how many of us have been there and done that. How many of us stand erect as Christians saying we will walk the walk as well as talk the talk, yet almost in the next breath we turn on Jesus. You come to church and get all pumped up and you're riding on high after a great worship service and hearing a tremendous life changing sermon, (must have had a visiting pastor,) and you feel on top of the world for God has touched your spirit and you confess to God, "Father forgive me for I have sinned." You hear his Spirit say to your spirit, "Through my Son you are forgiven." You promise never to sin again. You mean it. You will work hard at it. You will never turn your back on Jesus again. Yet within a short time you do what Peter does, you slip into sin, not once, not twice, not three times, but over and over again, too numerous to count. As Paul would say, 'the body is willing but, well the spirit is weak.' You slip back to that place where you had been. Then you remember words of forgiveness that came before and you confess again and you hear forgiving words again and you promise again not to

sin. But God knows sometime, some place it will happen again. He knows you're a work in process. You haven't quite got there yet. He knows if you call upon him again and again to forgive your sin, he is so faithful his mercy and grace is available always for those who repent.

What a wonderful Savior we have. He still removes the stones of doubt and failure from our lives and he continues to live in the lives that say yes to him. Just ask Peter. See how his life was transformed. On Pentecost 50 days after his resurrection listen to his life changing sermon where thousands of lives were transformed. He stood, not out of fear, but with the Holy Spirit's urging, and told the people the truth they needed to hear...that Jesus died and has risen in order to give life to those who will believe in him.

Max Lucado wrote about this, "For one of the few times Peter is silent...God is offering breakfast to a friend who betrayed him. And Peter is once again finding grace at Galilee. What do you do at a moment like this? What would YOU do? It's just you and God. You both know what you did. And neither one is proud of it. What do you do? You might consider what Peter did. Stand in God's presence. Stand in His sight. Stand still and wait. Sometimes that's all a soul can do...Stand amazed... (As) he invites you to try again. This time, with him." (He still moves Stones")

Peter touched the robe of grace and became a new creature in Christ. He acknowledged his failures and reached out to begin afresh. That's his story.

Will you who are struggling do that today? Come receive the grace that you need, the forgiveness that is offered? And if you have never received Christ as your personal Savior this is your day. Allow me to pray the sinners prayer of confession and lead you to Christ. Your life will change. Your soul will be cleansed. All because you had the faith and the courage to admit you are a sinner in need of a Savior. As the choir sings, come touch his robe. Come touch the robe where miracles can and do take place.