

# Broken Open

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John 21:1-19 (Easter Sunday 2010)

It's Easter Sunday at last! The winter has been long and the Lenten season has felt long. So I'm glad to be here, and I'm glad you're here on Easter Sunday. I've chosen an unusual text this morning, fast-forwarding the Easter story a bit. This text from John 21 is really an Easter Monday text. We encounter Jesus on the lakeshore in Galilee as though the empty tomb back in Jerusalem were already yesterday's news. Now the question asked is not, *What happened*, but instead, *What now*.

*What now* is a way of asking whether we have really grasped the message of Easter Sunday for our lives. What do we do with *unconditional love* – on Monday? Are we going to hang on to all the reasons we tell ourselves that God's love doesn't really apply to us? *What do we do with Easter on Monday?* What difference *should* it make? Why *do* we make such a fuss on Easter Sunday?

There's a story floating around the Internet that laughs a bit at the question of whether we have grasped the promise of Easter. The story goes that a teacher is trying to explain Easter to her second graders. She wants to see what the kids know, so she asks, "Who knows what Easter is about?" At first the children seem puzzled by her question. Then one small hand darts up. "Yes, Billy," prompts the teacher. Billy says, "Is it when everyone gets together and eats a turkey and celebrates coming to America?" "No, that's Thanksgiving," replies the teacher. "

"I know, I know!" Sally says, stretching her arm skyward. "It's where you decorate a tree and give each other gifts!" "Mmmm, no, that's Christmas, Sally," the teacher replies....carefully and kindly.

The children sit in silence for a moment until Bobby *slowly* raises his hand and says, "It's when Jesus was killed and put into a cave with a stone in front and...." "Aha," thinks the teacher, "here we go. Now we're on the right track!" So, Bobby finishes with a flourish, "And then," he says, "everyone waits for Jesus to come out of the cave to find out if he sees his shadow!"

We laugh, but do we really know any better what Easter is for? The beauty of the text from John 21 is that it gives us a pretty clear picture of what Easter means for the disciple Peter. It turns out that Easter is about *unconditional love*. Imagine a love that has no conditions – no exceptions – no If's or But's. Imagine the Jesus who says to Peter, *My love for you did not stop when you did not "get" what I was up to when I headed for Jerusalem. My love for you did not stop when you denied me three times. My love for you did not stop at the foot of the cross. My love for you did not stop at the door of the tomb. My love for you did not stay in Jerusalem when you ran away back to Galilee and picked up your old nets to fish as though you never knew me. Now, Peter. Are you ready to be broken open? Are you? Are you? Then, follow me.*

There's more! We get a completely convincing picture in this text of why it's so hard for us to even think about *unconditional love* in our own lives. There are three ways Peter still cannot imagine what *unconditional love* has to do with him. The first is that *Peter doesn't really see how his life can be changed!* After all the drama of Easter and meeting the risen Jesus, what does Peter do? He goes home, picks up his ratty old nets and his old ways and starts fishing once again for pike and bass. No whisper that Easter Sunday spills into Easter Monday. No hint that Peter was ever invited to fish for men and women. Back to the same old/same old. Peter's past is also his future.

Jesus approaches Peter from the shore. He calls out to Peter, *Peter, how's the same old/same old working for you?* As Peter contemplates his empty nets, Jesus calls out again, *Peter, try fishing on the other side of the boat!* In other words, *Peter, try fishing not in the direction of your past, but in the direction of God's future for you! You'll find that God's not done with you! There's more to come! Not more fish. More Peter!*

So, Easter is the day when you discover – you really, really get it – that God has so much more in mind for you!

There's another reason Peter has a hard time wrapping his mind around *unconditional love*. *Peter doesn't really believe he deserves a love like that!* When Peter jumps from the boat in his excitement at seeing Jesus on the shore, he gets brought up short by the sight of Jesus standing by a *charcoal fire*. This is a very poignant moment. The last time the gospel of John has mentioned a *charcoal fire* was in the courtyard where Peter denied Jesus three times, and then wept in his own shame. Now, here is Jesus himself standing by a *charcoal fire* as though to remind Peter that he ought to be ashamed.

But instead of accusation, Jesus offers Peter bread and fish. Jesus doesn't ask for Peter's shame. He asks for Peter's *hunger*: the hunger to start again; the hunger to be free; the hunger to love and be loved. Peter is not unworthy after all.

Easter is the day when you discover and really, really get that *you never were unworthy of God's love!*

One final reason Peter has a hard time receiving the *unconditional love* that is offered him. *He's afraid*. Love like this is so big, and Peter feels so small. Who is Peter to feed the sheep as Jesus has? Who is Peter to speak out loud of God's love? That's why Jesus says to Peter three times, *Do you love me, Peter, more than these?* Three times until it sinks in! Three times until it dawns on Peter that we are not talking *unconditional love* up in the abstract, we are talking *unconditional love* in a very human, fallible, passionate, hungry Peter. Listen carefully to what Jesus says: *Peter, do you love me more than the same old/same old? Peter, do you love me more than your own sense of unworthiness? Peter, do you love me more than your fear?*

Peter answers, a little unsure of himself, a little bewildered, a little hurt that Jesus has to ask him three times: *Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.*

*Peter, from now on, Jesus replies, you will be led by my love to places you cannot now even imagine. Come, follow me.*

*Easter: the day you let love lead and not your fear!*

Easter is a day to be broken open and to spill into all the days that follow. It's a day to see that what you give, receive! There's a lovely Easter moment in the movie *Blind Side*. I don't know if you have seen the movie, but Sandra Bullock is spectacular in her role as Leigh Ann, a hard-boiled southern belle who finds herself adopting a huge, young black kid off the streets. There's a moment in the movie when Bullock's character Leigh Ann is sitting in a restaurant with some old friends who are giving her grief about trying to fix the world and taking this kid off the street as her latest "project." Leigh Ann is having none of it. She sharply rebukes her friends for their suspicious minds and flinty hearts. They are abashed and they back off. One of them – kind of apologetically -- says to Leigh Ann, *Well, you sure have changed this kid's life.*

Leigh Ann stops for a second as though looking ruefully inside her own heart, and then she replies, *No. He has changed mine.*

You see, this isn't all about what God can do with a kid off the streets. It's about what God can do with Leigh Ann. What you give, you receive. It's an Easter moment and it's unconditional. Leigh Ann has been *broken open*.

We get broken open when we realize that God's love is real, and powerful, and personal. You see, we go around this anxious, angry world of ours with a huge assumption that either God's love is not big enough to break the cycle of pain or our goodness is not good enough to make a dent. We tell each other stories of our own powerlessness. We never cease to be amazed at the awful things the world can do. But when do we stop to be awed at what God can do?

Easter, that's when! Easter is when we stop to remember that all our conditions cannot stop God's love! Easter's when we are broken open – for good. Easter's when we say to God, *OK, God, I finally get that your love is real and personal and powerful. Now what?*

Easter Monday is when we find out, *now what*. I don't know about you, but I go out from this service and this place on Easter glad – so glad –that I have been here to witness the beauty of this hour and the company of people who will even *consider* getting broken open for God. But I know Monday is coming. And Tuesday. And God help me on Friday when I cannot remember how the music sounded and gospel spoke on Easter Sunday and I am trying to pick up the pieces of my week. That's when I truly need to hear all over again how Jesus broke open that old Peter long ago, so I can remind *this* version of Peter that the same old/same old is no longer in charge.

And so I pray that Monday will become my Easter Monday, when God's love gets traction in my life. And Tuesday will become Easter Tuesday, when I say goodbye to my same old/same old. And Wednesday will become Easter Wednesday when I get over my own sense of unworthiness. And Thursday become Easter Thursday when my fears disappear in my rear view mirror. And Friday become a Good Friday at last because I trust – *whew!* -- Sunday's a coming. And Saturday become a day of true peace and rest because Jesus just won't let me alone but keeps asking, *Do you love me, Peter?* And I say back, *Wow, Lord, you know – I do!*

I pray for you also. May you who have come to celebrate this Easter day, take it with you when you go. May your mind stay on God's love and not on your conditions. May you never stray from unconditional love. May you see God's love everywhere, even behind the masks we all wear and the fears we all secretly hold on to. May Jesus direct your footsteps and show you what He would have you do. May you discover in the *now what* the abundance of *Come, follow me*.

Amen