

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight,

8 am O God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

10 am Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer Amen

Good morning, everyone. My name is the Rev. Karen James, and I am standing in for Father Joshua while he and Edward are on a much-deserved vacation. Thank you for being here today.

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So, today's readings from Acts and John present two very dramatic yet separate events. Each feels so important and impactful that one might expect them to have their own Sunday. Together, however, they serve as a guiding light for those of us who try to follow Jesus.

At first, each event seems to stem from failure, such as Saul's failure to see the new Way as what the world needs, and Peter's failure to be honest when asked if he knew Jesus.

I'm sure we've all experienced failure at some point in our lives. Failure can feel final. Whatever form it takes—be it failure to act, fear, shame, or disappointing someone we love—when we fail, we may wonder.

“Will God still use me?” Both these men had good reason to ask that question. Peter denied Jesus and did not believe Mary’s account of the resurrection.

Saul fiercely persecuted the followers of the Way.

Yet they were each not *just* forgiven, they were called. Their stories remind us that Jesus meets us not with condemnation or blame but with

grace and purpose.

As Max Lucado said, “Grace is the voice that calls us to change and then gives us the power to make it happen.”

After the resurrection, Peter returns to fishing, perhaps believing his denial disqualified him from doing God’s work. He had once promised to die with Jesus but instead denied him three times. When he hears that Jesus has risen, Peter might not have felt instant joy—he might feel fear and shame.

But Jesus meets him where he is, on the shore. He calls out, telling the disciples present to cast their nets again after a night of no success. When they obey, the net fills with fish, and in that moment, Peter knows it’s Jesus.

They eat a *first breakfast* together. Then Jesus turns to Peter and asks a painful question: “Do you love me?” He asks not once but three times, mirroring Peter’s three denials. Each time Peter responds with a desperate yes, hoping Jesus will believe him, Jesus replies, “Feed my sheep.”

This triple question isn’t to shame Peter but to restore him. Jesus is forgiving Peter and entrusting him again with leadership that will propel him forward.

Jesus then speaks of Peter’s future: “When you were younger, you dressed yourself... but when you are old... someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.”

This foreshadows Peter’s future sacrifice. Grace has restored Peter, but it has also called him to a life of purpose and surrender.

This is what Jesus does. He takes what is broken and gives it a new purpose. He doesn’t discard the fallen—he redeems us.

Grace calls us back but also leads us forward—sometimes into challenging areas we do not feel equipped for, just as Ananias does not feel equipped to face the one who persecutes and calls for the death of ones such as he.

And what of consider Saul—a man not following Jesus but actively opposing him. He is on his way to arrest Christians when he is stopped in his tracks! Jesus confronts him directly: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”

Blinded, Saul is led into Damascus. For three days, he sits in darkness without eating or drinking. Then that same man, Ananias—afraid but obedient—comes to him. He lays hands on him, and Saul’s sight is restored.

Furthermore, Saul is baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit. The man who once breathed threats is now proclaiming that Jesus is the Son of God.

This is the power of grace—it turns enemies into servants. Saul’s name became Paul, and he became one of the most influential apostles. He wrote letters to churches, suffered greatly, and spread the gospel across the Roman world.

His past did not disqualify him. In fact, God used his past to magnify God’s power. Paul's transformation was a testimony that no one is beyond redemption.

Peter and Paul—two flawed humans. One denied Jesus, while the other fought against him. But both encountered God’s grace, and both were changed. And with that change, they received a commission.

We may experience times when we feel unworthy, ashamed, or stuck. But the same grace that restored Peter and transformed Saul is available to each of us.

Jesus doesn’t wait until we are perfect to call us. He meets us in our weakness and gives us a mission and a ministry.

Some of us might feel like Peter—ashamed of how we’ve denied or ignored Christ. Others might feel like Saul, resisting God, trying to stay in control. But Jesus calls to both: “Follow me.”

The beauty of grace is that it not only forgives—it restores, transforms, and commissions. Jesus doesn’t say, “Fix yourself first.” He says, “Come.”

Come as you are”

When Jesus asks, “Do you love me?” He is not testing us but inviting us. If our answer is yes, then the next step is clear: Feed his sheep, love others, work for justice and peace, and step into the calling.

God is not finished with you. The Spirit may be just beginning. God uses failures, rebels, and the unlikely to do the kingdom work.

When Jesus restores us, it’s not just to heal our wounds; it’s to send us forward.

So, let us ponder today. Are we stuck in failure like Peter? Or are we running in pride like Saul? Whatever our challenge is, we do not have to be afraid; Jesus is here. He calls us by name. He says, “Do you love me?” If you do, then follow me!”

Act, for love is a verb! Go where God sends you. Our failure is not the end; With Jesus, it can be the beginning of faithfulness. Say yes. Get up. Follow him. And let God’s grace write a new story with your life. Amen