

**The 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter ~ Sunday May 10, 2026**  
**“Joy Takes Root ~ Rebuilding What Was Broken”**  
**Psalm 40 // Jeremiah 18:1-11 // John 21:15-19**

Over the past few weeks, we've been looking at how joy takes root in the lives of the disciples after an encounter with the risen Jesus. What we've been discovering is that the kind of joy Jesus gives isn't shallow or fragile, nor does it depend on everything going smoothly in our lives. It's deeper and stronger than that. It's the kind of joy that can take root, and flourishes, even in difficult soil. (P) Our gospel reading this morning picks up where we left off last Sunday, with the disciples having breakfast on the beach with the risen Jesus. However, this time, the focus is entirely on Peter, the bold one, the outspoken one, the one who was always first to speak, first to act, and first to step out of the boat. The one who said to Jesus, "Even if all fall away, I will not." The one who promised loyalty no matter the cost. And then, in the space of a single night, it all comes apart. Three times he denies knowing Jesus, three times he distances himself from the One he swore he'd never abandon. And when the rooster crows, Luke tells us that Jesus turns and looks at Peter from across the courtyard, and Peter, coming face to face with the depth of his sin, goes out and weeps bitterly. (P) It's hard to overstate how deeply that moment would have cut. This wasn't just a mistake; it was total collapse—a failure at the very point where Peter thought he was strongest. This wasn't the kind of failure you can brush off with a shrug or laugh about later, but the kind that lingers, replays in our mind, and leaves us wondering if something important has been damaged—maybe even beyond repair. (P) If we're honest, we could admit that there's something about Peter's story that hits uncomfortably close. Although we may not have stood in a courtyard and denied Jesus with our words, many of us know what it's like to fall short in ways we never thought we would. We know what

it's like to say, "I would never..."—and then find ourselves doing exactly that. We know what it's like to carry regret, to feel the weight of disappointment, to wonder quietly whether we've disqualified ourselves from something—with others, or even with God. (P) However, all three of our readings this morning focus not on our failure, but on God's character. They show us that God doesn't just restore lives, He brings a new beginning, a fresh start, and renewed calling. We see this in the Peter's conversation on the beach with Jesus, as joy begins to take root. Joy that takes what's been broken and rebuilds it. Joy that meets us in our failure and raises us up. Joy that tells us our worst moments don't have the final word. (P) This morning I want to look at three lessons we can learn from Peter's conversation with Jesus that morning on the shoreline. As we walk through this passage, I want you to listen not just as observers of Peter's story, but as people who know something of their own story. Because the same Jesus who stood on that shore and spoke to Peter meets us today. And the question isn't whether we've ever failed; it's what does Jesus do with people who have? And the answer, as we're about to see, is better than we might dare to hope.

Lesson #1: Jesus meets us in the place of our failure. (P) John 21:15 reads, "When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter..." (P) There's something disarmingly ordinary about how this moment begins. No thunder, no dramatic confrontation, no public rebuke. Just a quiet moment by the fire, after a meal, with the sound of the water lapping on the shore. And then, gently but intentionally, Jesus turns to Peter and says: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" (P) Notice this conversation isn't initiated by Peter. He doesn't come to Jesus to clear the air. He doesn't step forward to confess or explain himself. In fact, Peter goes back to what he knows—fishing, working,

keeping his head down. It's Jesus who takes the first step, begins the conversation, and refuses to leave Peter at a distance. This tells us something vital right from the start: the work of restoration doesn't begin with our reaching out to Jesus, but with Him reaching out to us. (P) Notice also that this exchange takes place around a charcoal fire. As I said last Sunday, the only other place a charcoal fire is mentioned is in John 18—in the courtyard of the high priest—where Peter stood warming himself, and denying that he knew Jesus. This isn't a coincidence. Jesus is bringing Peter back—gently and deliberately—to the scene of his failure. Not to shame him or rub his face in it, but because true healing doesn't happen by pretending the past didn't happen. It happens when grace meets us right in the place where things went wrong—the place we'd much rather avoid. (P) Think about how we tend to deal with our own failures. There are certain places, conversations, memories we quietly steer around. A moment at work where something went wrong. A relationship that broke down because of something we said or did. A decision we regret and wish we could rewind and redo. And so, what do we do? We avoid it. We change the subject. We keep busy. We tell ourselves, "That's in the past," while at the same time doing everything we can not to look too closely at it. Why? Because we assume that if we go back there, all we'll find is shame. (P) However, when Jesus brings us back to these places, He doesn't meet us with condemnation, but with grace. That's exactly what David says in Psalm 40:2, "He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog..." (P) Notice the direction of movement. God doesn't stand at a distance and shout instructions down into the pit. He doesn't say, "Climb your way out, clean yourself up, and then we'll talk." He comes down into the mess, into the instability, into the place where our footing has given way, and He lifts us up. (P) We see this same truth in Jeremiah 18. The clay in the potter's hand is spoiled. It hasn't

turned out as intended. However, the potter doesn't discard it or throw it off the wheel in frustration. He keeps working with it—reshaping it with patient, steady hands. (P) That's what Jesus is doing here with Peter. He meets him not at his best moment, but at his worst. Not after Peter has proven himself again, but while his failure is still fresh. Not once Peter has sorted himself out, but right in the middle of the unresolved tension. And He does the same with us. (P) Sometimes when we make a mistake we think—either consciously or unconsciously—“Yes, God forgives, but He keeps His distance. Yes, Jesus loves me, but I've made things awkward. Yes, I can come back, but not quite the same as before.” And so what do we do? We keep Jesus at arm's length. We show up, we go through the motions, but we avoid letting Him get too close to certain parts of our lives. Parts we're not proud of. Parts we don't fully understand. Parts we're afraid might define us if they're brought into the light. However, this passage won't let us stay there because in it we see that Jesus isn't interested in a distant, surface-level relationship with Peter. He moves towards him. He sits with him. He speaks to him. He engages him right at the point of failure. This tells us that the place we're most tempted to avoid is the very place Jesus wants to meet us. That conversation we've been avoiding. That regret we keep pushing down. That failure we've quietly tried to move past without really dealing with it. What's that place for you? (P) These places aren't barriers that keep Jesus away; they're often the very places where He begins His restoring work. And so, the question isn't simply: Have I failed? because we all have. The question is: Will I allow Jesus to meet me there? Will I let Him step into those places—not to condemn me, but to restore me? (P) This is important because the joy that takes root—the real, lasting joy of the Christian life—doesn't grow by ignoring our failures; it grows when we discover that even there, Jesus comes to meet us.

Lesson #2: Jesus restores what has been broken. (P) Jesus asks Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” (P) And then He asks it again. And then a third time. Three questions, three responses. It doesn’t take a biblical scholar to see what’s happening here. Three denials around a charcoal fire in the High Priest’s courtyard, and now three opportunities to re-affirm love around a charcoal fire by the shoreline. This isn’t Jesus rubbing Peter’s nose in his failure. This is Jesus carefully, gently, honestly, and intentionally rebuilding what’s been broken. He doesn’t pretend it didn’t happen, but He doesn’t weaponize it either; He restores it. That’s how Jesus always works—not by ignoring the truth or crushing us with it, but by bringing truth and grace together in a way that actually heals. (P) Notice how personal this is. Jesus doesn’t speak in generalities—He doesn’t say, “Peter, you’ve had a rough week,” or “Let’s just move on.” He goes right to the heart: “Do you love me?” Why? Because the centre of Peter’s failure wasn’t just fear, it was a breakdown in relationship. A moment where love gave way to self-preservation. So, Jesus goes straight to the root. And with each question, Peter responds: “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” (P) You can almost hear the mixture of love and humility in Peter’s voice. The bravado is gone. The overconfidence has been stripped away. Peter is no longer comparing himself to the others. He’s simply clinging to what he knows is still true: “Lord, you know.” This is the turning point because restoration begins not when we prove ourselves again, but when we place ourselves honestly before the One who already knows. (P) Again, we also see this in Jeremiah 18. The clay was marred, and something went wrong in the shaping, but the potter doesn’t discard it. He keeps working it—pressing, shaping, reforming—until something new begins to emerge. That’s what Jesus is doing here. He’s not discarding Peter; He’s reshaping him. This is careful work. Intentional work.

Not rushed or superficial. Peter isn't being restored in spite of his failure, he's being restored through it. (P) Many believers carry quiet assumptions like: "I know God forgives me, but something has been lost. I can come back, but not fully. I'm still here, but I'm not who I could have been." In other words, forgiveness is possible, but restoration feels limited. (P) This isn't what we see here. Jesus doesn't say, "Peter, I'll let you stay in the group, but we'll keep things low-key from now on." He doesn't say, "Let's just move past this and not talk about it." He restores him personally, relationally, and fully. This is good news. It tells us that in Christ, our failures don't have the final word over our identity. Shame says: "You are what you did." Jesus says: "You're still mine." (P) Shame says: "You've gone too far." Jesus says: "Come back." (P) Shame says: "You can't be trusted again." Jesus says: "Let's rebuild this—together." (P) Having said this, I need to acknowledge that restoration does require something of us. It requires honesty. Peter doesn't deflect. He doesn't blame or minimize. He answers the question. For us, this may mean allowing Jesus to ask us some hard, but healing questions: "Do you love me? Will you trust me again? Will you let me reshape this part of your life?" (P) The same hands that shape the clay in Jeremiah, and the same voice that lifts from the pit in Psalm 40, are the hands and voice that are at work in us. God doesn't discard broken disciples—He restores them. Not quickly, not superficially, but fully. And when He restores, He doesn't just patch things up, He makes something new.

Lesson #3: Jesus re-commissions those He has restored. (P) If the conversation ended with restoration, that alone would be good news. However, Jesus doesn't stop there because the goal of this conversation isn't simply to help Peter feel better about himself or to heal his past; it's about restoring his future. Notice how after each of Peter's

responses, Jesus gives him a command: “Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep.” (P) In other words, “Peter, I am not done with you.” (P) This is the same Peter who, just days earlier, couldn’t even admit he knew Jesus in front of a servant girl. The same Peter who failed at the very moment when courage mattered most. And now Jesus is entrusting him with the care of His people. Not after a probation period or after a long season on the sidelines, but right here, right now. (P) This tells us something crucial about how Jesus works: Restoration in the kingdom of God is never just about the past—it always leads into calling. Jesus doesn’t just forgive Peter. He doesn’t just restore the relationship. He re-commissions him: “Feed my sheep.” This involves leadership, responsibility, and trust. (P) And then, as if to make it unmistakably clear, Jesus says what He said at the very beginning of Peter’s journey three years earlier on this same shoreline: “Follow me.” One step at a time. Forward, not backward. A renewed life, not a replay of the old one. This is a reset and fresh start that doesn’t pretend the past didn’t happen, just that it doesn’t get the final word. (P) This ties in well with Psalm 40:3, “He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord.” (P) Did you catch the movement here? Rescue to restoration to witness. The one who was in the pit now has a testimony. The one who was stuck now becomes a witness. The one who was broken now becomes a means of strengthening others. That’s David and that’s Peter. By the time we reach the Book of Acts, we see Peter standing up in front of crowds, proclaiming Christ boldly. The same man who once said, “I don’t know him,” now says, “Let me tell you about Him.” (P) It wasn’t Peter’s natural strength or personality that had changed, but the fact that he’d been restored by Jesus—and sent again. (P) People who’ve walked through failure, hardship, or deep struggle, and have come out the other side, are

often the most compassionate, grounded, and helpful to others—not because they have it all together, but because they know what it’s like not to. A person who has battled addiction is often able to walk alongside someone else in a way others can’t. Someone who has known grief can sit with another grieving person without needing to fix everything. Someone who has failed and been restored, often carries a depth of humility and a grace that can’t be taught any other way. Their past doesn’t disqualify them; it equips them. That’s exactly what Jesus is doing with Peter. (P) This is where this passage pushes against a common assumption many believers carry: “I can be forgiven, but I’m probably sidelined. I can come back, but not really be used again. I’ll always be the one who failed.” (P) This isn’t how Jesus treats Peter. He doesn’t say, “Let’s just keep things simple from here.” He says, “Feed my sheep.” He entrusts him again with what matters most. This tells us that in the hands of Jesus, our failures don’t disqualify us from our calling—they often become part of how we live that calling out. (P) This doesn’t mean there are aren’t consequences or that everything goes back to the way it was, but it does mean that God isn’t finished with us. Our usefulness in His kingdom isn’t over. Our story isn’t defined by our worst moment. And our calling isn’t cancelled because we stumbled along the way. In fact, for many of us, the very places where we’ve known weakness, regret, or failure become the places where God gives us the deepest compassion and the clearest sense of purpose because we no longer serve out of pride, but out of grace. (P) Jesus doesn’t simply restore broken disciples—He meets us in our failure, restores what has been broken, and then sends us out again—with purpose, responsibility, and grace. That’s where real joy begins to take root—not when we pretend we’ve never failed, but when we discover that even after failure, Jesus still calls us to follow Him.

As we step back and take in the whole picture this morning, what we see isn't just Peter's story, but the pattern of God's grace at work in the lives of all His people. The clay was marred in the potter's hand, and yet, it wasn't discarded, but reshaped. David found himself sinking in the pit, and yet, he wasn't abandoned, but lifted and set on solid ground. Peter failed in a moment that mattered most, and yet, he wasn't cast aside, but sought out, restored, and called forward again. (P) This is good news for us because if we're honest, we could admit that we carry parts of our story that feel unfinished, broken, or difficult to look at too closely. Moments we wish we could undo. Words we wish we could take back. Seasons where we wandered further than we ever intended to go. And the temptation is to believe that these things define us; that they set the limits of what God can do with our lives; that they quietly place us on the margins of usefulness in His kingdom. However, the Gospel says otherwise. It tells us that Jesus still comes looking for His disciples. He still meets us in the places we'd rather avoid. He still speaks words of restoration over lives that feel like they've come apart. And more than that—He still calls us forward. Not because we've proven ourselves again or somehow earned a second chance, but because His grace is greater than our failure, and His purposes aren't so easily undone. (P) And so, wherever you find yourself this morning—whether you feel steady, uncertain, or quietly carrying something heavy, I want you to hear this clearly: You are not beyond His reach. You are not beyond His restoring work. And you are not beyond His calling. The same Jesus who stood on that shore and spoke to Peter still meets His people today. And, if we love Him, the invitation remains the same: "Follow me." (P) Let's pray.