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John 21:15-17

Empowered: Serving Christ in my Relationships

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I flew to Austin, Texas this week for a conference with our new youth ministry intern. The flights were great; but I couldn't help noticing how airlines these days are always asking for volunteers. "This flight is overbooked, and we're looking for volunteers willing to be bumped to the next flight." Has that ever happened to you? "Our flight is very full and overhead space is limited, so we need volunteers to check their carry-on bags." Have you heard that one? Or, "Would anyone volunteer to shift seats so a family can sit together?"

Imagine, though, you get on a plane, and hear this announcement. "We're looking for a volunteer to fly the plane today. Someone who's always wanted to be a pilot, or is at least willing to give it a try." That would be crazy and weird, wouldn't it, to ask a volunteer to pilot the plane.

It feels just about as crazy and weird, for many Christians, when you're asked to volunteer for some kinds of church work. Now, some of you are quite comfortable volunteering here at Hope. But not everybody is at ease volunteering for ministry service. Plenty of Christians attend church faithfully, and believe fervently in Jesus; but don't tend to get actively involved. Donating stuff to a yard sale is fine. But sharing our faith in Jesus with a non-believer? Teaching a Sunday School class? Going on a mission trip? Some Christians -- many Christians -- just honestly don't feel qualified.

"My faith isn't strong enough," we say. "My past is too sketchy," we think. "How can I be good enough to represent Jesus Christ?" we ask ourselves. "How can I be capable of doing ministry in Christ's name?" we wonder. "How could a

person like me possibly be empowered to do Christ's work?" we question. Those are good questions, for all of us.

Those were the same questions that Jesus' friend Peter must have been asking, in the days after the Lord rose from the dead. Peter was thrilled to know that Jesus was miraculously alive again. But Peter was struggling with guilt. Peter was questioning his own fitness and qualifications to be doing ministry as a disciple of Jesus.

And here's why. Peter had screwed up. He had failed Jesus big time. Do you remember the story? On the night before Christ's crucifixion, Jesus has been arrested. Peter is standing outside the building where Jesus is on trial. Someone asks Peter, "Hey, aren't you one of Jesus' followers?" Caught off guard, afraid he'll be arrested, too, Peter answers, "No, I'm not." Two more times he is asked if he's one of Jesus' disciples, and Peter two more times says, "No, I'm not." Peter swears with an oath that he doesn't even know who Jesus is. He denies knowing Jesus three times.

So Peter now has good reason to be ashamed of himself. "There's no way I can serve Jesus anymore," he probably thinks. And many of us have been there, done that, though that ourselves. Most of us – really, all of us – like Peter, are not qualified, not good enough to serve and represent Jesus.

And that's exactly why today's Bible story is so important to talk about. It's a few weeks after Easter. Jesus is sitting with his disciples, after helping them catch a miraculous amount of fish. We talked about that episode last week. After finishing breakfast, Jesus looks Peter in the eye. He asks him a serious question, in front of the other disciples. Actually, Jesus asks Peter three questions. Let's read the story together, verses 15-17.

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." ¹⁷He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

Wow! Talk about pressure. The man who denied Jesus three times has to answer the question three times. "Do you love me?" And when Peter, on the spot, affirms and re-affirms and re-re-affirms his love for Jesus, the Lord re-commissions him as a disciple, re-commissions him as a ministry servant, re-commissions Peter as a church worker. "Feed my lambs," Jesus tells him. "Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep."

Friends, here's the key to this story. Here's the part we all need to grab hold of today. **Peter wasn't good enough to represent Jesus; but Jesus empowered Peter anyway to do his work."**

And this is what Jesus does still, in his church today. The living Christ looks people like you and me in the eye, and he empowers us. **We are not good enough, not perfect enough, not faithful enough; but Christ empowers us anyway to do his work.**

And not just here at church. Christ can empower you to serve him and represent him in your everyday relationships with people. Remember, Christ's whole ministry and his whole energy were focused on people. Christ was always loving people selflessly. Christ was

always leading people to God's truth. All people. Not just the good people, or the qualified people, or the religious people. Jesus loved all people selflessly, and led them to God's truth. So when you and I do that, in our day-to-day relationships and interactions with people, we are doing Christ's work, too.

Are you qualified to love someone selflessly this week? Christ is looking for volunteers, and Christ can empower you. Are you good enough, and faithful enough, to have a simple conversation with a friend or a neighbor that leads that person, in some small way, to God's truth? Christ can empower you, just like he did with Peter. Christ will empower his disciples today, and work through us, just like his disciples of old.

See, it's not really about you, and whether you feel good enough, when it comes to the Lord's work. It's about the living Lord in you. It's not so much about your qualifications. It's about how Christ can use you, how Christ's power can work through you, how Christ's forgiveness, won on the cross, can change you. It's about how the sweet mercy of a loving Savior gives you new life, and opens new possibilities for service for you, for me, for all of us in our church.

Who wants to fly the plane? Amen.