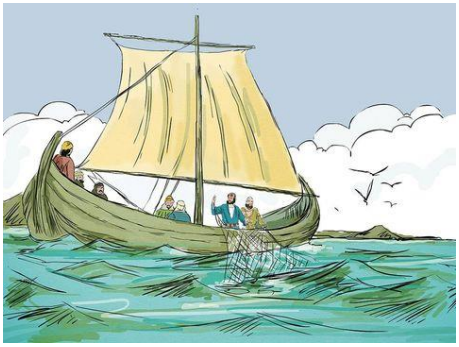
PETER'S REPENTANCE

Luke 5: 1-11; John 21 1-22

I've been here before.
Slogging away for no return.
I'd gone back to my fishing,
What I grew up doing, and knew well.
I sniffed the breeze, judged the wind and the currents,
Dropped down the net.
And hauled up with aching arms and hands.
Nothing.
I looked at Nathanael and Thomas. Caught John looking at me.
We could read each others thoughts.
What were we doing here?
How had it come to this?
We had seen Jesus twice since his resurrection
Not just seen but touched, - Thomas even more so.
Yet we felt flat, as empty as our nets.



The selfish retreat of fishing for fish that weren't even there a meaningless routine,
A hollow comfort of escape to the past, fear of the future.
As I hauled on the wet rope another weary time I felt a disbelief and frustration born of guilt. I had denied him three times in public, was now denying him with every pull of the net, my life returned to what had been normal.

I thought back three years, back in this very boat.
It seemed like an instant replay of when it all started.
Back there again, hauling up the unfilled empty weight. All night, nothing caught.
Frustrated, we'd been washing our nets when this man Jesus had asked to step on board, preached his gospel from there to the crowds gathered on the shore.
And when he had left speaking told us to go out again, to launch into the deep, let down the nets. I remembered and felt the pointlessness, the weariness and memory sending a shudder down my spine.
I'd answered for all of us. What's the point, - the fish just aren't biting.
Yet we obeyed because he had asked.
When I hauled up, I had nearly fallen in with the jolt. The net had broken with the weight of fishes.
I'd had to call James and John, - and here we were again. Time was all confused. We had struggled to bring the catch to shore, -it had filled our two boats, and we only just made it.
The fish must have been there all the time.
We had been dumfounded, and when he said to follow him, we did. Left all. He became our master.
Three years of non-stop miracles, lepers cleansed, limbs restored, multitudes fed, storms stilled by his word, - he had even got me to walk on the water, until I looked down and began to sink! I knew he was the Christ, - I'd told him! He shewed us what could be done.
He overcame death. I'd seen him twice since! And here I am still fishing.
And I have caught nothing.
The rocking of the boat seemed to mock us all.

I stretched up long and hard, the early morning light glinting on my sweat drained nakedness. Turned to James and John.
"I've just been thinking back three years ago. We'd all been out fishing, and the fish just weren't there. Do you remember, it was when we met Jesus. He spoke to the crowds from my boat, and afterwards said to launch forth. I scoffed at the idea, but we did, and couldn't bring the load of fishes in! You had to help us. And here we are again. It's like a bad dream!"
Had I achieved nothing in all this time? The daft panic question…Was Jesus just a dream?

I hauled again at the reality of another empty net.
A stranger on the shore called out.
"Children, have ye any meat?"
He can't see the barren wooden floor, awash with froth and weed.
I shout back the understatement of the year. *"No!"*
He calls out yet again:
"Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find."
We felt impelled to obey.

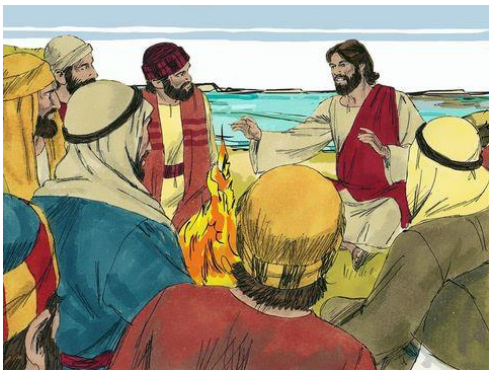
PETER'S REPENTANCE

Luke 5: 1-11; John 21 1-22



The net went over the other side, and it was barely drawn across the water when it resisted, almost fought against us; it was heaving with fish!
John said, "It is the Lord."
Tears filled my eyes with re-ignited memory..
I now KNEW! Grabbed my garment, tied it quick and tight, dived in!
Jesus! Jesus!

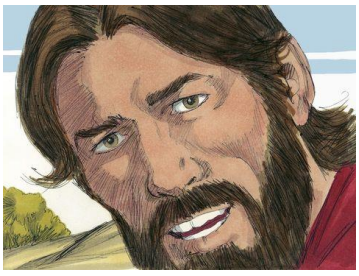
Powerful strokes gave the lie to previous weariness.
I reached the shore, stumbled through the dragging water,
Dripping joyously as I ran to him.
He was sat calmly by a fire of coals, with fish and bread.
"Bring of the fish which ye have now caught."
We all heaved the full net up the beach,
Renewed strength, newly awakened.
Another flash back those three years hence, - those nets had broken, but this now not spoiled. We stopped to count the abundance. One hundred and fifty-three!! And they were big fish too!
Was I living in the present or the past? I heard again Jesus' earlier words as we hauled those broken bursting nets: "Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men."
And I had selfishly gone back to my fishing….



The present jolted back at me:
"Come and dine."
We ate of our fish, the work of our hands. The bread and the fish were the best I'd ever tasted, but that was not why I remembered that meal. It was Jesus, my Lord. The Christ. Sought me out yet once more. Me not deserving. I had disowned him in public three times, but here he was, not disowning me, any of us. We had even denied him by going back to our fishing, despite having seen him alive since his awful crucifixion which only John watched. Why did he even bother to look for us? How did he find us?

I felt his love.

The rising warm light of a beautiful cloudless day was matching and lifting heart and soul.
We had finished, all comfortable round the fire. Wondering. Trembling with anticipation.

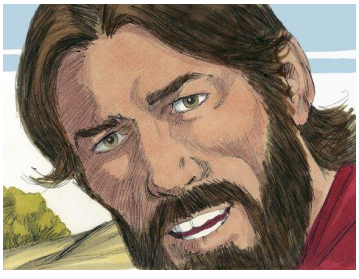


"Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?"

What a question is this! Why pick on me? In front of everyone! And why Simon and not Peter? Had my reversion to fishing, my denials, robbed him of the rock he expected me to be? Not "Have you truly repented" but "Lovest thou me." That's the real proof. Who or what is more important? What do I really value most? What I think of myself, or how much I really love him? I give my answer.
"Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee."

"Feed my lambs."

Be a fisher of men… do as I first asked of you! Change again. Genuine repentance, not skin deep, convenient….He speaks again:

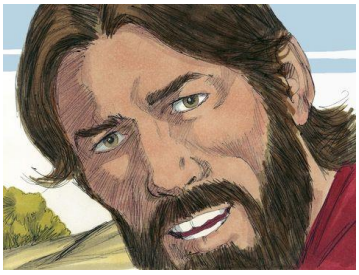


"Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?"

He's reading my thoughts. Supporting the true repentance taking place. No comparison "more than these", just the direct need to love him. That is all that is needed. I reply exactly the same:
"Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee."

"Feed my sheep."

Look after my flock, feed them with the gospel of Love, the manna from heaven; I leave them in your charge. Lord am I worthy?

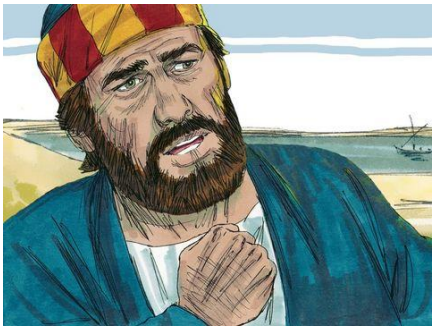


"Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?"

You ask me the third time whether I love thee. How deeply I love thee. Are my affirmations not stronger than my three denials? Guilt makes me aggrieved. I am being tested.
I feel his love, it revitalizes my very being. I am caught in the memory of fish too many to haul, that first command to be a fisher of men, to reach out to the world and bring them the gospel, not just to feed but to nourish. They are waiting for me. They need my obedience. I answer with the assurance of his blessing:

"Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee."

"Feed my sheep."



His final command confirms his forgiveness and re-establishes the purpose and rock of my being, the selfless demand to love God and not self, before which we all must bow.
And in that true repentance of thought, changed wholeheartedly from self to God, I know I can never again go back. A new and deep awareness fills my being. Words are easy. I must now reach out and prove my love for Jesus by my love for others. No more denial, but stronger, so much stronger, the affirmation of *God*-based action!

My life-purpose changed: Not about me, about others.

FEED MY SHEEP!

And I just knew in another flash of understanding, that as Jesus had given me this command, he knew I would have all that was needed to fulfill it. He had re-established in me what he had declared before I had denied him: "*Upon this rock I will build my church*."

"FEED MY SHEEP"

I WILL

I knew once again that the power of God was with me, and as God had been with Jesus so that Love would be guiding me in my deeds. My love of Christ would be evidenced by what I did now.

The past did not matter. A weight had lifted off me. I felt the joy of reaching out at Christ's command. My love for Jesus was to be shown in my love for others.

"Feed My Sheep"

I looked at Jesus and he read my thoughts "I give you my oath, I will"

Acts 5:12 (to ;)
And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people;

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