



Bethany Lutheran Church & Preschool
5051 McCarty Road
Saginaw, MI 48603
www.bethanysaginaw.com
Phone: 989-793-9579

Viewpoints

Viewing life as Christ's cross-scarred hand points out the blessings he's overseeing.

Despair No Longer ~ May 2, 2013

About a month ago here in Michigan, a thirteen-year-old boy committed suicide while at school. He got permission from his teacher to go to the restroom and there he killed himself. Why did he end his life? And for that matter, why the average of 100 Americans daily committing suicide? Although arguable, the general consensus is that suicide is committed out of despair.*

Peter fell into despair. After boasting to Jesus' face that he was ready to die for Jesus, he did an about-face. Three times. According to Mark: "Peter swore to them, 'I don't know this man you're talking about.' Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: 'Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.' And he broke down and wept" (Mark 14:71-72).

Judas, who had betrayed Jesus into the hands of the Pharisees, was also struck with remorse that led to despair. He hanged himself. Would despairing Peter similarly commit suicide?

Remember, when the disciples realized that Jesus was crucified, they were shell-shocked. It was like they were the suddenly-made-deaf and disoriented spectators standing near the bombs detonated by the Boston Marathon terrorists. And for Peter it was as if he was standing over the bomb. The result is graphic: he was hurled into a despair made all the more hellish by unrelenting guilt and shame. This is why Jesus, through the Easter angel, tells the women at the empty tomb: "Don't be alarmed... You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here... But go, tell his disciples and Peter..." (Mark 16:6). Of all the disciples, the most-maimed is the one personally named.

Hold that thought while looking at Christ's resurrection appearance on the beach. Remember that while the disciples were fishing in a boat, the Risen Jesus had made a fire and prepared breakfast? After the breakfast, Jesus had an important dialog with Peter (John 21:15-22). "Do you love me, Peter?" Jesus asked. "Yes," answered Peter. Jesus asked Peter again, and Peter answered affirmatively, again. And then Jesus asked Peter a third time—at which point Peter was hurting because he was remembering his three-fold betrayal of Jesus.

There's a healing purpose in Jesus' three questions. Like a skilled surgeon, Jesus is removing deeply buried shrapnel—imperceptible fragments of guilt that could in the future fester again into despair. And although Jesus does not use these three words "I" – "forgive" – "you," Jesus does give forgiveness. In fact, forgiveness on steroids is pumped into Peter after each of Peter's responses, when Jesus says:

- "Feed my lambs."
- "Take care of my sheep."
- "Feed my sheep" and "Follow me!"

Each of these sentences spoken by Jesus is dripping with forgiveness and restoration, as Jesus graciously empowers Peter to serve in his kingdom.

Chances are good that at different times when Jesus asked you to serve him, you thought you were receiving an imposition of some degree or another. But learn from Peter: when Jesus asks you to serve, his request is dripping with forgiveness, restoration and empowerment. Jesus doesn't need us as much as we need Jesus to ask us to serve!

And if Jesus asks you to serve where some pain is involved, even then it's the carefully measured prescription from the Great Surgeon, guaranteed to deepen your appreciation for life now and forever. Thus, to a despairing Peter, the Risen Jesus messaged forgiveness; and then on the beach he deepened the reality of forgiveness by asking Peter to serve.

Forgiveness that's deepened by serving the Savior is what that despairing 13-year-old boy needed... and what an average of 100 despairing Americans daily need... and what you and I need, too. I don't know about you, but when I hear Jesus calling me to serve him, I now realize that his request is for my benefit, because it comes dripping with life. ☩

* Commonly cited causes for this despair include depression, psychosis, drugs/alcohol abuse, financial difficulties and troubled interpersonal relationships. When I've been called to minister to grieving families, a combination of these causes was observed to have been burdening the person who committed suicide.

Source Material (Links may become inactive over time.)

[Suicide Causes](#) @ suicide.org

[Suicide Facts](#) @ Suicide Prevention Services of America

To become a recipient of Viewpoints, please email mike.nitz@bethanysaginaw.com and simply type the phrase "VP please" in the subject line. Or if you wish to no longer receive Viewpoints, type the phrase "discontinue VP" in the subject line. Thanks.

Blessings to you and your loved ones, Pastor Mike Nitz

