

“21 Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee.[a] It happened this way: 2 Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus[b]), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together.

3 “I m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “ We ll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

4 Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

5 He called out to them, “ Friends, haven t you any fish?”

No,” they answered.

6 He said, “ Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

7 Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “ It is the Lord!” As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “ It is the Lord,” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. 8 The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards.[c] 9 When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

10 Jesus said to them, “ Bring some of the fish you have just caught.” 11 So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, “ Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “ Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. 14 This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.”

Dial Gold hand soap. For me it’s dial gold hand soap. What am I talking about? One of the most powerful memory recallers is the sense of smell. The sense of smell is directly adjacent to both the memory and emotion centers of the brain. The smell of something specific becomes almost linked with memories and feelings of something that was in the past. My grandmothers farm, in East Troy, was always a great fun getaway for my siblings and I. We would spend hot summer days out riding on the tractor, playing in the sand pit, and catching lightning bugs in the field at sundown. And whenever we would go back inside we would always wash our hands in the bathroom sink, and always without fail, it was a bar of dials gold hand soap.

And whenever I happen to use that particular soap, the smell instantly brings back a feeling of a simpler time in my life. One of fun and lack of responsibilities. Of warm and sunny days and pleasant times at grandma and grandpas.

I’m sure that all of you probably something of that sort. Whether it’s a smell that instantly transports you to somewhere else. A sound that calls to mind a different time. A

taste that is more than just that individual food but a feeling and a memory of a time long ago.

This section of Scripture has a powerful event of remembrance. A callback to something that had happened earlier in the disciples' life. This is at least the third time that Jesus has appeared to his disciples. We heard about how he appeared to them twice in the locked room while they were hiding, and he quelled the doubts of Thomas. Here we find the disciples on the Sea of Galilee, out of luck without any catch of fish.

Jesus calls to them and tells them to let down their nets on the right side of the boat and they were unable to haul the net into the boat because there were simply too many fish. The memory was clear. There was a time long ago that they were out of luck with no fish and a man made their nets about to burst with the catch of fish. I'm sure the memories connected to this came flooding back so powerfully, overwhelmingly, as they realize who this is, everything that they had done with him, everything that had transpired. Their reactions give no doubt on their recognition and excitement of who this event was caused by: **“Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “It is the Lord,” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water.”**

But there is another powerful memory that happens in this account. It's one that is not joyous, not jovial, not pleasant. Because after Peter goes and swims frantically to Jesus, what does he find? “They saw a fire of burning coals there”

It may seem like an unnecessary detail, but I want you to consider something. When was the last time in John that we saw Peter, next to a fire of burning coals?” Well, it was Holy Week. The last time Peter was around a fire of this kind with Jesus nearby someone posed the question to him: “You aren't one of his disciples too, are you?” And around that fire of burning coals, Peter so confident, denied he knew Jesus. Peter, who said that if everyone else leaves you, I will not, it was there around a fire of hot coals that Peter swore he had nothing to do with him.

I wonder if Peter had memories attached to burning coals. That the radiating heat brought back memories of his sin. That the smell of that faint smoke brought back the emotions of the tears that he cried afterwards. A pit in his stomach of the painful memories.

Perhaps you have something like your own fire of coals. Maybe there are things that come about that bring memories not of things that are pleasant, but painful. When you walk into a room and you feel very sad about what you know happened there. You know what you did that you are ashamed of. You see someone who looks familiar and your stomach drops because you wouldn't dare face them after what happened. The smell that reminds you of your past mistakes. The scar that is a permanent reminder of sinful behavior.

Satan will try to use these painful reminders to make you think that there is no hope for you. That the fact that you feel so guilty means you must be. He wants you to peer at that room, smell that scent, hear that sound and believe that even God couldn't forgive you.

How does Jesus deal with Peter around the reminder of his denial? Well it's actually in the following verses, the ones that come after the gospel lesson we read, which is the continuation and the culmination of the account: **"When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?'"**

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

Still around that fire of hot coals Jesus asks him twice more, recalling the three times that Peter had denied him around a fire like that one. But notice what Jesus doesn't do. He doesn't bring him back to the place of hurt, he doesn't scold him for the pain that he is already feeling in his bones from the weight of sin.

No, Jesus comes to him as an individual, among a group of disciples, to give his soul the care that he must need at that time. Peter required special attention, individual assurance for the guilt or doubts he must have been feeling. A special one on one exchange with the Savior, who gives him the assurance of his grace and favor, by his presence, with his words, with his commission and reinstatement of bold Peter once again.

Jesus wants him not to remember his sin, but his love and his grace that covers that sin. Jesus wants him to remember how he called him from the boat that first time, undeserving, to be his disciple and follower. Jesus wants him to remember how he went to the cross and called out from it, that it is finished. Jesus wants him to remember how he rose from the dead for his justification. To remember not his unworthiness, but the fact that because of Jesus, he has been reinstated for a life of service.

Jesus wants us to remember too. Not the things that Satan would have us obsess over. But about Jesus' grace. Our Savior who appeared to the disciples on the Sea of Galilee wants you to remember his sacrifice covers all of your sins, even the ones that still come to your memories. Remember the fact that God says whoever believes in me will not perish but have eternal life. Remember you Savior who has the power over your sins, your death, and the devil himself.

And Jesus provides this care in such a powerful way to each of us: Individually. And for 15 young men and women, for the first time this weekend. When he invites you as an individual to come to his table. And there to receive a wafer and wine. And as you eat and drink, you can remember what God promised to you: That there are his very own body and blood, there are his own forgiveness of sins for you. How he reinstates you, so to speak, for a life of service to him.

It's pure speculation, but I wonder if Peter probably remembered a fire of burning coals differently after that day. That the smell and warmth of the fire didn't bring back tears and memories of denial, but of the love and forgiveness of his Savior. I want you Christian to remember these things in those moments of terror, in those visceral times where you remember your sins, Jesus wants you to remember your Savior. Remember the sacrifice he made for you on the cross, remember his resurrection from the dead, remember your Baptism, remember the Lord's Supper, and say: I am a child of God.