

Easter 3 5/1/22
John 21:1-19 C
Confirmation Sunday

GOSPEL LESSON, FROM THE 21ST CHAPTER OF JOHN'S GOSPEL

George Herman Ruth, the Babe, was one of the greatest baseball players of all time. In fact, it could be argued major league baseball is today what it is because of Babe Ruth. Baseball is a game of numbers, and you don't have to be a die-hard fan to know that for 39 years, Babe held the record for most home runs with 714. He was the first player to hit 60 home runs in one season, a record he held for 34 years until Fargo's own Roger Maris hit 61 in 1961.

But there is, as the voice on the radio would remind us, the rest of the story. You see, Babe Ruth, for five seasons of his playing days, led the league in ... **strike outs**. In fact, for 29 years, the holder for the most career strike outs in baseball with 1, 330 was ... none other than our friend Babe Ruth. But, I'm guessing you know Babe Ruth more for his home runs than his strike outs.

What about you? What's the story of your life? Are you known for your successes or your failures? Your home runs, or your strike outs? You've heard me say repeatedly that the greatest struggle any of us have is to see ourselves as God sees us. This Sunday, once again, we are reminded that God sees us forgiven in Christ and as instruments of His grace. Look at the examples before us this morning...

Our Gospel for today reminds of when Jesus first called Peter, Andrew, James, and John three years before and told them that they would catch men instead of fish. Peter decided to work off a little energy by doing some fishing. Once again, they caught nothing. Then Jesus appeared and

just as the last time, Peter and his fellow fisherman found themselves with almost more fish than they could handle.

Jesus and Peter had a little over three years of history between them since that last great catch of fish. Some of it was pretty good and some of it was ... well, plain awful.

Peter had given one of the greatest confessions of Christ. When Jesus asked the apostles who they thought He was, Peter confessed, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mt 16:16).

But, it wouldn't take long for Peter to fail. Immediately after Peter made that wondrous confession, “Jesus began to show his disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to **correct** him, saying, ‘Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.’(Mt 16:21-22).”

Did you catch that? Peter corrected Jesus. He thought that when Jesus predicted His upcoming suffering and death – the very reason He came to this earth -- Peter thought the Son of the living God made a mistake!

Then of course, there is Peter's prideful boast in the upper room. Jesus tells them plainly, “You will all fall away because of Me this night.” Peter just couldn't help himself, “Though they all fall away because of you, **I will never fall away.**’ Jesus said to him, ‘Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.’ Peter said to him, ‘Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!’ (Mt 26:30, 33-35).”

You know the rest of the story. Peter denies Jesus three times. The rooster crowed and Peter wept bitterly.

What would you say of Peter? Is he remembered for his home runs, or his strike outs?

In spite of his failures, guess who wanted Peter? Jesus did. He wanted him to be an apostle. He wanted Peter to serve His flock.

Jesus didn't leave Peter in the guilt and grief of his sin. He forgave Peter. He comforted Peter by restoring him.

And, look at God's grace at work in our first reading. Saul is on the road to Damascus to arrest the Christians there. Guess who wanted Saul as much as Peter, so that he could be Jesus' own? Jesus came to Saul in a great light and a great voice. Jesus said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." The grace of God in Jesus Christ was for Saul, the persecutor, as well. That grace made Saul into Paul, the evangelist to the Gentiles and author of almost half of the books of the New Testament.

What is true of Peter and Saul is true of you and of me, My Friends in Christ. God's grace in Jesus Christ is for you and for me. When we were fast bound in sin and held slavery by our fear of death and the grave, Jesus humbled Himself to be born of a virgin to redeem us. He had no sin, but paid the ransom price of our sin by taking upon Himself all of our sins, all of our failures and shortcomings, and suffering and dying for us. **RED FLOWER** reminds us of His blood shed all over the cross to buy us back from sin, death, and the devil. Jesus did that so that we would be "His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness" (2nd Article).

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! And the Good News of Easter is that God's grace in Jesus Christ is for you! Peter and Saul stand for us as examples of God's mercy. We see Peter and Saul forgiven, we know that

God will forgive us.

And, you need that forgiveness. In rashness and foolishness, you have made vows like Peter and Saul. **Today, we celebrate the Rite of Confirmation.** At your Confirmation, you vowed – **as our confirmands will today** -- to live according to the Word of God, and in faith, word, and deed to remain true to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, even to death? So, how you doing with that? How's that working out for ya? How about your wedding vows? Have you always honored and cherished your spouse? In the shame of your sin, you have promised God, "I'll never do that again." But, you have. In your God-given vocations, you have failed God and your neighbor.

But, rejoice and be glad. The grace of God is for you. The grace of God that gave to Jesus to live a perfect life, suffer, died, and rise again comes to us just as it came to Peter and Saul. **Our confirmands are asked,** as you were, "Do you intend to hear the Word of God and receive the Lord's Supper faithfully?," because God the Holy Spirit uses those means of grace to make the forgiveness Jesus won on the cross your forgiveness.

Our confirmands know well my favorite question to ask. And, I'm guessing – in fact, I'm hoping -- that you know it as well by now – **WHAT DOES GOD DO WITH SIN?** He forgives it! He forgives it for the sake of Christ Jesus.

We need that forgiveness. We all daily sin much. And as grave as that is, it only gets worse. Satan tempts you, and then condemns you. We live in a world of condemnation. The world condemns you, because you don't measure up, you aren't good enough by their silly, stupid standards; you did this and we will never forget. And, perhaps the greatest of all, we condemn ourselves.

The greatest struggle for us, Dear Children of God, is to see ourselves as God sees us.

What a beautiful, glorious Sunday this is! **The family of Concordia celebrates Confirmation.** And, we see Jesus forgive Peter, a fisherman who couldn't seem to get his foot out of his mouth. Jesus went out of His way to meet a man who persecuted Christians and forgave him. In the same way, Jesus is here ... now ... He comes to you to forgive you and give you a life in Him. Amen.