

Recently I met up with a friend I hadn't seen in a while. This person has been in my life for as long as I remember, and we love each other very much. But, not long ago, we had an argument over the phone, as friends sometimes do. It was a good fight – the kind that can only happen between two people who know each other really well. We each dug deeply into our side of the argument, and there were tears and hurtful words, because of course we really know how to push each other's buttons.

Thankfully, the whole thing didn't last long. By the time the conversation ended, we had calmed down. We had each owned up to our fault in the matter, and we apologized.

But still, when it came to seeing each other in person for the first time after that... I have to admit I was nervous. I wondered if my friend would be holding a grudge. I wondered if maybe I was holding a grudge, too. After all, it wasn't very hard for me to remember the hurtful words spoken to me.

On the day we met up, I was so happy to see my friend, and they were genuinely happy to see me, too. I could see it on their face; I could feel it in our hug. And easily, we moved forward, catching up on life and playing with each other's kids and having meals together.

What must it have been like for Simon Peter that day when he saw Jesus on the beach? Was there any worry that Jesus might be holding a grudge?

Remember, on the day of the crucifixion, Peter was a terrible friend. When asked if he was one of Jesus' followers, Peter said no. He denied Jesus, not just once. Not twice. Three times that day. That's like, not just a little betrayal. That's going all in... at the worst possible time.

Peter must have worried there could be no moving forward after that.

And at first, when Peter recognizes the risen Jesus he is overcome with joy! And at least, for a moment, he doesn't think of anything except getting back to his friend as quickly as possible. In one of the funniest scenes in scripture, he puts ON his clothes and jumps into the water to swim (even though just staying on the boat would have gotten him there sooner).

I wonder if that joy started to give way to dread as he hit that water and started to swim to the shore. I wonder if he started to remember what he had done. If he started to worry that maybe things could never be the same between them.

But they share a meal, and without pointing a direct finger to what had happened between them, Jesus does find a way to bring it up. And he gives Peter the chance to put all of that behind them. He asks Peter, "Do you love me?" And Peter is eager to say, "Yes, of course!"

It was around a charcoal fire in the courtyard of the high priest that Peter first said he didn't know Jesus. But now, around another charcoal fire, Jesus gives Peter the opportunity to proclaim his love, not once. Not twice. But three times.

In asking three times, Jesus makes it clear that there is no unfinished business...no grudge. Forgiveness is full and complete. And they can fully, completely move forward together.

Jesus has a reason for this, of course. It's not just for Peter's sake.

Because Jesus has work for Peter to do. He's going to ascend into heaven and give his disciples the task of being his body on earth. There's no time for grudges or shame. There is work to be done...sheep to be fed.

So he simply says, "Alright then... follow me."

Jesus does what is so hard for us to do...to forgive. To let go. To look ahead instead of back. Instead of that, we people have a tight grasp on our mistakes...and on others'. We beat ourselves up and agonize over things we have done and things we've left undone.

Our tendency, when we have messed up like Peter, is either to hide, or to point a blaming finger, or even worse.

We see this everywhere today, don't we? So much anxiety; so much resentment. And in our youngest people, an unprecedented number of teens are resorting to self-harm, and even suicide.

The world is not a forgiving place, and it's easy to panic; to think there is no way forward.

Someone starts a rumor about a teenage girl and she has no idea how to stop all the whispers. A star athlete gets caught cheating and loses his scholarships, and suddenly he doesn't think he could possibly ever be worth anything. We make a mistake, big or small, and we beat ourselves up endlessly. Social media makes these things seem enormous, and permanent.

The dread and anxiety that creeps up in us can be all-consuming. It can be so hard to believe that things could ever be OK again. We see people so lost in all of this shame and guilt and anxiety that they don't see any other option than to just crawl into a tomb and hide there.

But Jesus shows us that there is hope. There *is* a way forward.

Jesus looks at us with love, and never looks back. He calls us to wake up and splash baptismal water on our faces and remember that new life is possible – right now. Every day. No matter what. He promises that every single day is a chance to start again. And no matter how impossible it feels, there's a way out of that tomb.

Friends, what will it take for us to trust this? What will it take for us to believe that new life is real for us, *right now*, and to proclaim it to all the other lost sheep around us?

That's the urgent work that Jesus calls us to. There's no time for looking back, because this good news is so very needed in our world.

So Jesus appears to us today. He offers forgiveness, he gives us a job to do, and then --- feeds us breakfast.

Feeds us, because this work is not going to be easy. We're going to need a hearty meal to get us through it. Jesus tells Peter that someday someone is going to put a belt around us and lead us where we don't want to go. Yes, this mission of God will lead us to places we do not wish to go!

Following Jesus won't always be easy; and just when we want to pull the covers up over our head, we find Jesus, dragging us out of bed by the belt loop...splashing that water on our faces, feeding us, and sending us out again.

But he doesn't send us alone. He promises to take the lead.

Jesus has gone ahead of us already. He went into those tombs and he met our shame and our sin and our guilt and our hurt there, and he gathered it all to himself, and he destroyed it.

So all that's left is a new life.

And this means, my friends, that there is always hope. Whatever you're holding on to today, whatever feels impossible to get beyond – there's hope for that.

There is hope for your marriage.
There is hope for your child in crisis.
There is hope for your illness.
There is hope for your grades.
There is hope for your addiction.
There is hope for the sick earth.
All of it.

Jesus calls us to trust in that promise of new life. To let go of all that seeks to hold us back, and to follow him instead.

Splash that baptismal water all over your face and defiantly face the new day. Eat a meal of forgiveness and love at this table. Follow Jesus out into a new future.

Because the tomb, and everything that was in it, is empty. Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed. Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!** Amen.