A Place Called "Familiar"

A message delivered to
MAYER COMMUNITY CHURCH

April 11th, 1999

TITLE: A Place Called Familiar

TEXT: John 21:1-15

THEME: Our tendency is to return to the familiar!

THRUST:

INTRODUCTION:

Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection is the Message of Redemption.
Approximately three years prior to the events of that week,
at the beginning of Jesus' ministry,
Luke reveals to us an example of Jesus' interaction
with His disciples.
The scene is a small lake.
Peter and several others had been fishing all night
and had caught nothing.
Jesus has just finished preaching to a large crowd
from the boat Peter had been fishing from,
and asked Peter to move the boat into deeper water.
Jesus then told Peter to let down the nets,
Peter, after an explanation of their futile night says,
"Nevertheless, at your word, I will let down the nets."
Immediately, the net was teeming with fish ...
so many that it began to break.
"When Peter saw this, he fell down at Jesus' feet and said, 'Depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful man."
Jesus said, "Don't be afraid, I will make you fishers of men!"
The account concludes with these words:
"When they had brought their boats to shore, they forsook all and followed Him."
Approximately three years later, they have all forsaken *Him*.
The events of the week following Jesus' resurrection
have been obscured, obviously by the resurrection,
but also by the tremendous power manifested
through the ministry of these disciples.
How did they get from the depression of their denial
to the place where they themselves were able
to endure persecution?

John 21:1-15

1. The *Site of* the Familiar
2. Our *Flight to* the Familiar
3. The *Plight in* the Familiar

I. The *Site of* the Familiar

Site, not as in vision, but place or position
i.e. a construction site.

Peter's "Site of the familiar" was fishing.
He was a fisherman by trade, it was his vocation.
He was at home in an open boat
with wind, waves and a fishing net.
What is your "Site of the familiar?"
I am not speaking of a *sin* you may habitually return to.
Nothing is said in this passage
about the Disciple's fishing being sin.
Perhaps *your* site of the familiar is, like Peter's - your job.
Perhaps it's a place you go inside your head, to escape.
Perhaps it's a room in your home, or a favorite chair.
Whatever, wherever it is, it is a special place;
a place that is *familiar* that you can retreat to
when you are overwhelmed.
It is what is *natural* for us to return to.
It is not *sin* (unless it is a sin) in and of itself.
It is *reasonable ... comfortable ... reliable*.
When our minds are full or our hearts are heavy
It is what helps us cope.

II. Our *Flight to* the Familiar

Peter was *overwhelmed* by the events of the past several days!
— He had seen Jesus betrayed by another friend.
— He had seen *that friend* commit suicide.
— He had seen Jesus falsely arrested,
and was powerless to stop it.
— He was not only powerless, but found himself
denying that he knew Jesus.
— He had seen Jesus crucified
and had lost all hope for the Kingdom of Heaven
ever becoming an earthly reality.
— He had suffered through three days
of personal recrimination and loss.
— Then, he hears that Jesus was alive
and had spoken with Mary.
— He saw the empty tomb ... the wrappings ... the napkin....
— Then, sometime during that Resurrection Sunday
Jesus appeared to *him personally*. (Lk 4:34)
— Now, he knew with a certainty,
but instead of becoming settled,
he had more questions than before ...
How? Why? When? What now?
— His mind was reeling ...
— He was experiencing emotions

he didn't even know existed!
— Evening arrives ... a new day is about to begin.
Jerusalem is in an uproar
the disciples are in hiding
the door is shut ... the conversation is muted.
Two disciples are recounting their experience
on the road to Emmaus,
when suddenly Jesus appears in their midst!
Not only do Peter and the other disciples have to contend
with the enormous ramifications of Jesus' resurrection,
but, the comprehension of His presence
not being confined by the normal boundaries
of time and space
is more than they can take.
The Bible says they were terrified!
They thought they were seeing a Ghost!
Jesus proves His presence
by showing them the wounds of His suffering
and by eating a piece of fish.
Then they walk out of that room
on their way to Bethany
and Jesus is carried up into heaven.
A week later, they are all in that room ... again,
with the door shut ... again,
when Jesus suddenly appears in their midst ... again.
After all these things,
After all the extreme swings of emotion
is it any wonder Peter said, "I'm going fishing."
"I need to get back to what is familiar!"
Is it any wonder the others said, "We're going with you."
So, they took flight to the familiar.
They were on sensory overload.
They needed a good strong dose of normal!
So, they took flight to the familiar.
But it's not the same.

III. The *Plight in* the Familiar

They toil all night with no results.
Dawn brings a calmness to the lake.
The disciples are emotionally and physically exhausted.
A solitary figure on the shore
encourages them to try the other side of the boat.
Their nets are overwhelmed with big fish.
John says, "It's the Lord!"

Peter immediately jumps ship and swims to shore.
When the others finally arrive,
they find that Jesus has prepared breakfast for them.
While the others are gathering around Jesus,
Peter is gathering in the net full of fish.
Still trying to pull a sense of *familiar*
out of the events swirling around him.
The disciples are amazed at the size of their catch,
153 fish ... and *their nets didn't break* – unbelievable!
Even the *expected* becomes *unexpected* when Jesus comes!
When Jesus comes, we should expect the unexpected.
Without Jesus, the familiar is no longer the same.
With Jesus, the familiar becomes exceptional!
The *plight of the familiar* is that there is a very real danger
of taking the miraculous, in the familiar, for granted.
Bible Scholars have long debated the spiritual significance
of that number ... 153, prime factors of 3, 3, & 17.
The *significance* is simple – somebody counted the fish!
Somebody was so taken with the familiar
that he was *busy* counting fish!
The *plight* of the familiar is that if we are not careful
that which is familiar will supplant the presence of Jesus!
The picture before us is that of Peter, surrounded by fish.
Into that scene walks Jesus, and He asks Peter,
"Do you love me more than these?"
I can see Peter raise his finger, like, "just a minute, Lord,
147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152 ... 153 – WOW!
Yes Lord, you know I love you."
Peter didn't fully answer the question.
The question was *not* "Peter, do you love me?" But,
"Peter, Do you love me *more than these*?"

The *plight of the familiar* is that too often,
Jesus is put on "hold" while we sort through our affairs,
"...151, 152, 153!"

Jesus' Familiar site was Gethsemane.
Jesus' Familiar site was the Mount of Olives.
Jesus' Familiar site was the place He withdrew to for prayer!
Jesus wants the *Flight of our familiar*
to be the *Flight of His familiar*,
meaning the presence of God.
Jesus told His disciples in John 14
"I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am there you may be also."

Jesus is now telling Peter,
"My site of the familiar is now ready for you Peter,
are you ready to come to my *Familiar site*?"
Jesus wasn't condemning Peter.
Jesus wasn't condescending.
Jesus was just letting Peter know not only that He wanted
to be part of Peter's Familiar, but also
that there was something better.
Next time you surround yourself with the familiar
and Jesus comes with the question,
"Disciple, do you love me more than these?"
How will you answer?
Will you evade the question
because of the inner turmoil?
Will you make a commitment this morning
to love Jesus more than these that are familiar?
It may be your family; it may be fishing ... it is all that is familiar.

Psalm 91:1-2

CONCLUSION: Hymn #356 *Near to the Heart of God* ~Clelend Boyd McAfee

1
There is a place of quiet rest, near to the heart of God,
A place where sin cannot molest, near to the heart of God.

Refrain
O Jesus, blest Redeemer, sent from the heart of God,
Hold us who wait before thee, near to the heart of God.

2
There is a place of comfort sweet, near to the heart of God,
A place where we our Savior meet, near to the heart of God.

3
There is a place of full relief, near to the heart of God,
A place where all is joy and peace, near to the heart of God.