

Loving Your Regrets

Woodside Church

January 7, 2018

The flickering fire casts light upon the faces of the little group warming themselves around the fire. They are waiting in the high priest's courtyard while Caiaphas carries out an unusual overnight interrogation of a prisoner – that troublesome rabbi Jesus.

Peter is among the group around the fire, trying to hide from the others how nervous he feels. He wants to see what will happen to Jesus, but he certainly doesn't want to get arrested himself. Two times he'd already denied accusations he was part of Jesus' group.

Finally, guards emerge from the doorway, shoving Jesus in front of them. "There's the prisoner they arrested," shouts a man who has just joined the group around the fire. "Yep that's him!" barks another. "And you know what – this guy here," pointing directly at Peter – "was with him. I'm sure of it." "I don't know what you are talking about," Peter bellows, turning to run away. Just then the raspy gargle of a rooster crowing breaks over the noise. Peter stops dead in his tracks.

He remembers the conversation at dinner the night before. The disciples arguing about who was most loyal, deserving of a place of privilege by Jesus' side. Peter boasting, "Lord I am ready to go with you to prison. I'll even die with you." Jesus gently replying, "Peter before the rooster crows in the morning, you will deny three times that you even know me."

Peter didn't believe it at the time. But now he realizes he's done just that – denied Jesus. Exactly 3 times. Peter turns back to look at Jesus, now in shackles, standing nearby in the courtyard. Jesus gazes back at him, staring deep into his eyes. The look is full of sorrow and love, yet to Peter it feels like a spear piercing his soul, confirming his self-accusation. After everything Jesus did for him, Peter refused to even be associated with Jesus in his most desperate

hour. Peter acted cowardly. Dishonest. Unfaithful. The shame is overwhelming. Everything appears hopeless to him now. Not waiting to see what terrible things the guards will do to his friend, Peter rushes out of the courtyard. As he stumbles through the dark streets of Jerusalem, convulsive sobs force themselves from his throat.

Talk about regrets! Wow. Peter sure has them. And he sure as heck didn't love them as our sermon title suggests. Loving Your Regrets. Hmm.

Most of us can probably think of many, many regrets. I know I can. Let me let you in on a secret – I am an Eagles fan. You might have noticed many Sundays I wear my Eagles jersey...just trying to bring my team some luck!

And hey the Eagles were doing pretty good right? Back in early December when some unnamed fellow congregants tried to ruin my good luck charm by putting a COWBOYS hat on my head, it didn't work. Eagles still won. ONE Sunday I decided that since I was assisting with a baptism I should NOT wear my jersey. Day of the Seattle game. And what happened? Thumbs down. They lost. And thus began the downward slide of poor play, heartbreaking losses and an ACL tear! All because I regrettably didn't wear my jersey?! Probably now.

Some of our regrets are light – make a good sermon illustration. Some regrets we can't laugh at. It's either too soon or just too painful. There's a website called secretregrets.com where people publicly post regrets they might never say out loud. They even have the "regret of the day." Here are a few:

- "I regret cheating on my spouse. I stopped seeing the other person but am now consumed with regret and a fear that the affair will come out, which would devastate my spouse and do permanent harm to my relationship with my kids, friends and family." **Regrets of Action – things we wish we never did.**

- “My biggest regret, one that plagues me in my waking moments and some sleeping moments, is that when I was given the opportunity to go to USC for screenwriting I was too scared to take the chance.” **Regrets of Inaction– opportunities we didn’t take; things we didn’t say or do.**
- “I regret not telling people how he hurt me. Now, if he is hurting other people, it’s my fault.” **Regrets of Reaction – things that were done to us.** There’s nothing we did to cause regret, but we regret they happened TO us. Often we’re mad or sad or hurt they happened to us. These regrets of reaction can be the ones that hurt the most.

Let’s listen to the story of Jacqueline. She knows regret...VIDEO: Testimony Part 1

Jacqueline had a lot of unfair things happen to her. A lot. And now she’s stuck in the Sorry Cycle Pastor Doug spoke about last week – longing for things to be different; trying to fulfill that longing in an inadequate or harmful way; feeling regret about it, and instead of trying to do something different, attempting to fulfill that longing in a faulty way again. To her there doesn’t seem a way out.

What regrets did you bring with you today? Action? Inaction? Reaction? We are doing this series **Starting Over: Your Life Beyond Regrets**, because God doesn’t want any of us to live life stuck in these regrets. God offers us a life free from regret. But we have to be willing to take it.

Jon and Dave Ferguson, the authors of Starting Over, throw out this challenge “Fall in Love with your Regrets!” What? Why? The past is the past – I just want to forget about it. But we don’t –we hash and rehash over what was said or done or not done and never move on. What if instead of regretting our regrets, we face them head on, scrutinizing them for any useful info they can provide. If a certain action, inaction or reaction has proved harmful, we can learn from

it and make better choices next time. Instead of regretting our regrets, what if we tried to love them for what they can teach us.

Easier said than done, right? Some of you may be sitting there thinking, Sure, fine – If it had simple regrets. There’s nothing to love in my regrets. We are forgetting one HUGE thing. GOD. We have God with us – remember that tiny baby; Emmanuel; God with us? Starting over isn’t just about making a change – it’s about making a change **with God**. Things that seem impossible ARE possible because of God. Let’s see how Jacqueline’s story turns out.

VIDEO- Testimony Part 2.

As Jacqueline discovers, those longings that keep starting us down the wrong path - those longings can only be fulfilled in God, not in seeking to satisfy our own desires or numb our pain. When we acknowledge the power of God in our life, we realize some amazing encouragement. As we try to improve our circumstances; to break out of the sorry cycle; live past regret, God is right there with us, invisibly at work in our lives. It’s a joint process; even though we may only see our own side. Wow! God really wants to fulfill our longings and redirect our efforts so that we need not feel regret. We are NOT alone in this struggle. God is with us, making it possible by his power and his grace. God can use EVERYTHING for good. Even if that doesn’t make sense to you. Even if you can’t imagine.

Remember the story we started with – Peter and his crushing regret of denying his friend and Lord THREE times? Because of Jesus initiative, Peter’s story does not end there. It has a beautiful and redemptive sequel. Peter is stuck in that regret, but Jesus won’t let him stay there. As we move to the next scene in Peter’s story, Peter is sitting around a beautiful morning campfire with the risen Lord and some of the other disciples. It should be a joyous time. But Peter just can’t let go of the regret he feels. After Peter fled from that Courtyard, Jesus was condemned,

beaten, and crucified. Peter saw his closest friend and master laid to rest in a tomb. Even now, knowing Jesus defeated death and rose again and was sitting there with them, Peter still carries the weight of his own failure.

Many of us can imagine what he felt like, can't we? Sure, the circumstances are different, probably not as drastic, but we know what it is like to feel the sting of regret burning in our souls. (Pause)

After they ate, Jesus asks Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," Peter replies, "you know I love you." "Then feed my lambs," Jesus tell him. (John 21:15). Not once, not twice, but three times Jesus asks the question: "Do you love me?" And not once, not twice, but three times Peter responds, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Three questions. Peter's three denials. And Jesus does something in this exchange that helps Peter start over.

First, Jesus **Confirms** the Relationship. When Jesus asks, "Do you love me?" he's reassuring Peter: "Because I still love you." When we know we are loved, it makes a huge difference! When we are loved and feel secure, maybe we can find the courage to face our regrets. Jesus doesn't chastise Peter, he doesn't rehash what happened, he doesn't blow it off as no big deal, he doesn't give Peter the cold shoulder. No, Jesus affirms his love for Peter and gives Peter the opportunity to affirm his love back. He **confirms** the relationship.

But Jesus does something else too... Jesus Confirms Peter's **Purpose**. After each affirmation of love comes this charge: "Feed my sheep." Jesus, who earlier refers to himself as "The Good Shepherd," commissions Peter to join him in carrying out his mission in this world. By giving Peter a job to do he is saying, "Peter, you still have a purpose to fulfill. You are not disqualified. I'm not done with you. I want you to lead and care for my followers."

This scene between Jesus and Peter is really one of the most spectacular interchanges in the entire Bible. Jesus refuses to leave Peter stuck in regret. He confirms their relationship. He confirms Peter's calling. And with this, the regret that hovered over Peter ever since he denied Jesus, now evaporates like fog struck by sunlight.

Out of Peter's regret was birthed an even deeper love for Jesus and a truly committed, heartfelt passion for his mission. He went on to be a leader in the church; the Rock on which the church was built.

What Jesus did for Peter; he wants to do for us!

- If you are stuck in a regret of action, hear God saying, "I love you no matter what happened. Nothing can ever change how I feel about you."
- If you are stuck in a regret of inaction, hear God saying, "It's not over. I'm not done with you yet. There's still time."
- If you are stuck in a regret of reaction, hear God saying, "You are not damaged goods. I adore you. You are my beloved. I have plans and purposes for your life."

We don't need to beat ourselves up about our mistakes; we don't need to regret our regrets -- we can love our regrets for what they teach us and with the grace and love of God they can launch us forward into a better future.

So why am I up here giving the message? Because of inaction and regret. And Jesus. For many years I struggled with my purpose; my calling. And I felt God nudging me. In fact, about eight years ago I felt him pushing me to leave my corporate job. I justified Him away with excuses of finances and flexibility for my family. And then overnight the company went bankrupt. Taking with it our college savings and leaving me with all the flexibility I'd never want. Talk about regret – my not listening, my inaction certainly didn't pay off! Then I tried

answering God's nudges with things I thought I should do – joining a GG, becoming a GG leader, even coming on staff. These are good things for sure and I certainly don't regret them. But I still felt God pushing me further. And I didn't have the guts to dig deep to see what he was really asking. I felt paralyzed.

But God persists when we don't and eventually through repeated messages in scripture and devotions, He made it clear – I want you to share your voice. I want you to give the message. “Me? Let me remind you God – there's no seminary degree here. And I'm getting pretty old. Wrong number. But I'm doing what you asked – look we have 52 GGs! Yea God! Really?”

But the shove wouldn't go away and finally one day, I shot off an email to Pastor Doug. “If ever...way down the road...you might need another person...would you possibly maybe consider if I could add any value...” I gave him lots of outs. And man, that God – with minutes, before I even had time to regret hitting send, Doug replied “Great! Was just praying about that. Sermon team meets every Tuesdays 9: am. See you there. “Ack! All God. Just took me years to really get it. And now that I got it, I'm pretty terrified about it! (Deep Breath)

Peter knew what it was to receive God's mercy, to be given new life, to have hope again. So did Jacqueline. And now so do I. We can love our regrets because we can learn from them and with God's help make the choice to break free from regret.

The last thing Jesus says to Peter around that charcoal fire is “Follow Me!” (John 21:19). He invites Peter on a journey to put his regrets behind him and live beyond his regrets.

What Jesus does for Peter; he wants to do for you and me. He wants to confirm your relationship. He wants to confirm your calling. He wants today to be the day you start over. Will you say yes?

Please join me in a word of prayer.

Father God, we come to you this morning carrying our past regrets. I pray you would start a work in each of us today. May today be the starting line for a new story...a story of life beyond regrets.

Lord, I pray for each and every one of us here today who wants to start over. I pray we would hear your still small voice inside of us saying, "I love you." I pray we would find courage through our relationship with you to start over. And I pray that you would begin to give us a vision for how you want to redeem our regrets.

Lord, I know you have plans and purposes for every person in this room. Today may we begin to discover those purposes as we take the next step on this journey with you. It's in your name we pray, Amen.