

McCabe UMC
Asking The Right Questions (part 6)
Do-Overs!
John 21:15-19: May 18 & 19, 2013
Pastor Rick Fossum

I heard Garrison Keillor, the host of *Prairie Home Companion* on Public Radio, tell a story about Larry Sorensen. Larry is a fictional character from Lake Wobegon which is a fictional town. Larry is a bit unusual. According Keillor, Larry has repented 12 times at the altar rail of a Lutheran church. Larry keeps walking up to the altar rail following the Sunday service, gets on his knees and he repents and repents and repents. Like I said, so far he has repented twelve times. Somehow, he can't get beyond the repenting stage.

I'm pretty sure Larry wants to be free and move on with his life, but he has a problem. He doesn't think he's forgivable. He can't imagine that Jesus could ever forgive someone like him. He can't even imagine forgiving himself. And so he keeps coming back to the altar rail, Sunday after Sunday and continues to repent and repent.

What about you? Are you forgivable? Are you free to be that special person God created you to be?

These are today's questions in keeping with our series, *Are you forgivable? Are you free?*

Simon Peter, the Apostle, was like Larry Sorensen and maybe like some of us. He was always blurting out things without thinking and doing stuff he'd later regret. But the worst thing he did and perhaps it was his greatest sin was when he denied knowing Jesus not once, not twice, but three times.

At the beginning of John, chapter 21, we hear Peter say, "**I'm going fishing.**" By this time, I think he'd given up on ever being an Apostle again. "**Apostles aren't supposed to do what I have done,**" he might have thought to himself. "**I let Jesus down. I failed him. What do I do now? Where do I turn? This guilt is killing me. I'm going fishing!**"

Have you ever been there? I mean *'there'* where you've done something wrong . . . where you've sinned and the guilt is overwhelming? You look at yourself in the mirror and you just can't imagine how you could ever be forgiven.

A man entered a bar, bought a drink and then immediately he threw the drink into the bartender's face. He quickly apologized, grabbed a napkin, dried off the bartender's face and said, "**I'm sorry. I don't know why I do these crazy things, but I have this compulsion that tells me to do it. I fight it, but I don't know how to stop it. The guilt is awful.**"

The bartender replied, "**You had better do something about your problem. I'm going to remember you and I'll never serve you another drink until you get help.**"

Months later, the man walked into the bar again and smiled at the same bartender. When he asked for a drink, the bartender said, "**no-no. I remember you.**"

The man explained that he had been seeing a psychiatrist and that his problem was solved. He convinced the bartender and he gave him a drink. The man took the drink and once again he threw it into the bartender's face. "**I thought you said you were cured,**" the angry bartender screamed.

"**I am,**" said the man. "**I still have the compulsion to do it, but I don't feel guilty about it anymore.**"

Guilt! Guilt has to be one of the worst parts of sin. Someone once said, "*Guilt is like the red warning light on the dashboard of your car. You can either stop and deal with the problem, or you can cover it with a piece of duct tape.*"

I think a lot of us try covering up our guilt rather than dealing with it. And when we do our guilt ends up in a special closet located somewhere deep inside of us. We try to keep these closets closed and forgotten, but the guilt inside sneaks out and it reminds us just how terrible we are. The guilt of the money we borrowed, but never repaid. The fight with a friend. The times we lost our temper and hurt a loved one. The hurtful names we called people. The times we took things that didn't belong to us. Being unfaithful. Lying. Cheating. The list goes on. It's all there in our closets.

I have guilt in my closet. One of my greatest feelings of guilt is how I treated my dad growing up. My dad owned a dairy business. He'd deliver dairy products to stores, farms and homes. Almost every Saturday morning, my dad would come home and get me up to help him. By this time on Saturday, my dad had already been working for several hours and he was tired. He needed the help.

I didn't want to help my dad. I knew my friends were getting to sleep in . . . it was a Saturday after all . . . and I wanted to sleep in to! I tried everything I could think of to get out of helping my dad. I tried hiding. I tried pretending to be sick. I tried ignoring my dad. I tried everything. Most of the time my dad did get me up, but I made him pay for it by not being very nice to him. It still haunts and hurts me today.

My dad died young. And most of what I remember about my dad is how awful I treated him. I wish I had that part of my life to live over, but I don't. I know Jesus has forgiven me. I even know that my dad has forgiven me. But I just can't quite get myself to say, "**It's OK, Rick. Move on.**"

Do you have guilt hidden in your closet? Those places where you keep many of your secrets. Those secrets, that shame you, embarrass you, disgust you and disappoint you. They keep revisiting you when you least expect it and they haunt you and hurt you.

I think this was how Peter was feeling. He had his own closet and inside were many of the mistakes and sins he'd made including the big one where he denied knowing Jesus three times. He couldn't get over it. He couldn't imagine Jesus ever forgiving him. He couldn't imagine forgiving himself.

When I was growing up, my friends and I used to say the phrase '*do-over*' when we were playing different games like neighborhood baseball or basketball, but especially when we were playing a game of kick-ball. Do you remember using '*do-over*'? For example, you'd kick the ball hard and sometimes, where we played, it would head toward the tree in the next yard. The ball would hit the tree and bounce its way down through the branches and then get stuck. According to our kick-ball rules, the ball was considered '*out-of-play*' and the game was stopped until we got the ball down. Instead of being penalized, the kicker would get a '*do-over*'. Or, he'd get a second chance to kick the ball.

Peter got a '*do-over*'. He got a second chance. It was the same Peter. Yes, he'd denied knowing Jesus three times. Yes, he had abandoned Jesus when Jesus needed him the most. Yes, he went into hiding because he was afraid of being recognized as one of Jesus' Apostles. And yes, he stuffed all that sin and guilt into his closet and he went fishing.

Yet, and this is called grace. Any yet, Jesus didn't give up on Peter. In spite of what Peter did, Peter got a '*do-over*'. He got a second chance. It happened like this: **"Peter,"** Jesus said, **"do you love me?"**

"Yes Lord," Peter replied, **"you know I love you."**

"Then feed my sheep!"

Jesus asked him the same question three times before Peter finally understood what he was saying. He was still an Apostle. He still had a job. Jesus still had plans for him in-spite of what he had done. **"Don't quit on me now,"** Jesus was saying. **"You have a job to do. You sinned. You goofed up. You fell down, but you can get up. You're forgiven. I'll be with you. I will help you. Now, go out into the world and serve me."**

And Peter did. Which brings us to us. What's in your closet? What keeps coming back to haunt you and hurt you?

In Australia, there is a coat of arms with a picture of two animals: One is an emu and the other is a kangaroo. These two animals have a special appeal to the Australians. Both the emu and kangaroo can move only forward, not back. The emu's three-toed foot causes it to fall if it tries to go backwards, and the kangaroo is prevented from moving in reverse by its large tail. For Australians, it's one of their mottos. The past is past. Move forward.

As Christians, we're called to move forward and not backward. We've been given a '*do-over*'. Maybe more '*do-overs*' than we can count. Like Peter, we can't change the past. What's done is done. We're called to move forward. We're called to repent, seek forgiveness and follow the one who loves us more than we can imagine.

Jesus hasn't given up on us. He wants us to be the persons he knows we can be. He wants us to serve him in our corners of the world. Are you ready? Are you willing to be forgiven and move on? That's today's real question.