SCRIPTURE:
When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

“Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!”

Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord, who is going to betray you?”) When Peter saw him, he asked, “Lord, what about him?”

Jesus answered, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.” Because of this, the rumor spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?” (John 21:15–23).

MESSAGE: THAT’S NOT FAIR!
One of my favorite stories in the Bible is not often preached. The prelude to this
story starts with Peter’s thrice denial of Jesus in spite of vehement assertions that he would never do so. After the resurrection, Jesus met Peter on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Matching the number of denials, Jesus three times asked the same question, three times heard the same response from Peter, and three times gave the same admonition. Peter was grieved at the repetition of the question, yet was also deeply grateful for the undeserved forgiveness and, astonishingly, the call to shepherd Jesus’s flock. This is as far as most sermons take the story, but it doesn’t end there. Jesus continued, speaking of a time when Peter would be led away against his will, alluding to his eventual death, bringing glory to God as a martyr. In response, Peter looked over at John—who all knew had a special relationship with Jesus—and asked “What about him?” Having just been assured of immeasurable grace and forgiveness, Peter’s first thought was to ask if God was going to be fair! What about that guy you seem particularly close to? Will he get his fair share of the sufferings to come? Jesus, pointedly, gave Peter no such assurance, telling him that it was none of his business. “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?” In that sentence, Jesus told Peter to walk the path that God laid for him, without concern or bitterness that the road for others may seem easier.

I can identify with Peter more than I wish. I too often compare the trajectory of my life with those who seem unfairly blessed. Peter’s story helps me out, reminding me that if I look to God for some human sense of fairness, I will inevitably be disappointed. There is joy in walking the path that God has uniquely given to me. A path that may take me through darker places than I might chose, but always with the assurance that it will end in the light of God’s glory.

REFLECTION:

1. Do I ever confuse the justness of God with my own sense of fairness?
2. Can I walk the path God has given me with faith, independently of comparisons with others?

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, let me never think of myself as more righteous than Peter, or far from making myself the judge of your decisions. Let me rejoice in your sovereignty and in the strength you provide to walk the path uniquely given to me. Take from me any spirit of bitterness or jealously so that I may genuinely share in the joy and sorrow of others, without the need to measure their experiences against my own.
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Gregg Davidson is a professor and chair of Geology and Geological Engineering at the University of Mississippi. He is a frequent writer and speaker on science and Christian faith, with a science fiction trilogy thrown in just for fun. His latest nonfiction book, *Friend of Science, Friend of Faith: Listening to God in His Works and Word*, was released in 2019.

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