

Letters from a friend

THE INVITATION OF THE SECOND CHANCE

As you know I like to play golf. When I didn't play golf it looked a really easy game. As many of you know, I trained as a P.E. teacher because I like sport and am fairly competent at most of them. I have a good eye for a ball: I loved playing football and rugby when I was at school, I still play football today....and I loved the racquet sports: tennis, squash and badminton. But when I was young I never played golf.

I got into playing golf because of the church re-development project as a way of raising money. In all the other sports I'd played I could hit a moving ball quite well! In golf the ball is not moving when you hit it... but somehow it turns out to be a lot harder than it looks! And what I learnt very quickly in golf is that every shot counts.

It is surprisingly easy to make a mistake when trying to hit a golf ball, and, as I have discovered, if you make one mistake and hit one bad shot – it often leads to another! Every bad shot counts against you on the golf course.

Golf is a game of rules! Lots of rules... but it has one absolutely beautiful rule...at least for some people.

In golf there's a rule called a mulligan. A mulligan means you can play a shot again... and not only can you play a shot again, but you can play it for free! If you hit a bad shot, and if your playing partners agree, you can play that shot again and it won't be counted against you! Your bad shot won't be counted against you: it won't be written down; it won't appear on the score card... in fact it will be as if it never happened. If you are given a mulligan, you get a clean slate, a fresh start ...you can play your shot as if for the first time! At my level of golf, I am a fan of mulligans!!

I'm thinking, wouldn't it be wonderful if we could have mulligans in other areas of life too? Wouldn't it be great if, in other areas of life, I could call 'mulligan!' If I make a mistake, or get something wrong, or do something stupid, I could

simply say 'mulligan' and the slate would be wiped clean. I could start again as if nothing had happened, and whatever I'd said or thought or done wouldn't be counted against me!

A young promising junior executive at IBM was involved in a risky gamble that cost the company \$ 10 million. He was called into the office of his boss, the founder of IBM who had become a business legend. The junior executive went into the room full of guilt and fear and immediately offered his resignation. The founder of the company wouldn't accept his resignation. "I've just invested \$10 million in education you," he said. "I can't afford your resignation!"

After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested *Himself* in this way.² Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the *sons* of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together.³ Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will also come with you." They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing.

⁴ But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.⁵ So Jesus said to them, "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" They answered Him, "No."⁶ And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find *a catch*." So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish.⁷ Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped *for work*), and threw himself into the sea.⁸ But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net *full* of fish.

⁹ So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire *already* laid and fish placed on it, and bread.¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have now caught."¹¹ Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn.

¹² Jesus said to them, "Come *and* have breakfast." None of the disciples ventured to question Him, "Who are You?" knowing that it was the Lord.

¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave *it* to them, and the fish

likewise. ¹⁴ This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead.

¹⁵ So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs."

¹⁶ He said to him again a second time, "Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, "Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep.

¹⁸ Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to *go*." ¹⁹ Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me!" (John 21 v 1-19 NASB)

Surely, if anyone knew about making a mistake it was Peter. If anyone knows about failure, surely it's Peter. My best guess is that all of us, to one degree or another, know about failure. Peter's story is a story that speaks to any of us here broken by failure. It's a story for any of us who might be desperately hoping for, and needing, a mulligan. It's the story of a man who thought he'd failed so badly he'd put himself beyond the reach of God's love and grace. If you have ever been broken by failure and think God can't love you then this story is for you!

Peter and the boys have been fishing all night and have caught nothing. Jesus suggests they try again by putting their nets on the other side of the boat. Remarkably, since they haven't recognised Jesus, they do and their nets are bursting with fish. The penny drops and Peter rushes to meet Jesus on the beach. Jesus is already fixing breakfast...and there's something that leaps out for Peter and pierces him right to the heart. The text in the NASB tells us that Jesus is cooking over a charcoal fire! Peter knows about a charcoal fire, this detail is not lost on him.

¹⁷ Then the slave-girl who kept the door said to Peter, "You are not also *one* of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." ¹⁸ Now the slaves and the officers were standing *there*, having made a charcoal fire,

for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter was also with them, standing and warming himself. (John 18 v 17-18 NASB)

In his moment of deepest failure, when he denies he even knows Jesus, Peter is warming himself by a charcoal fire. Now Peter meets Jesus on a beach, and Jesus is cooking over a charcoal fire. Peter, suddenly, shockingly, remembers his moment of deepest failure, and in this moment he knows that if he is to be with Jesus, he will have to face the truth about who he is and what he's done.

And friends, the challenge for us is that we must do the same: we have to face up to the truth about ourselves. Peter had many failures, but denying Jesus was his greatest, and maybe he thought it was unforgivable. How hard must this moment be for Peter? How hard is it for you and me to face the truth about ourselves?

After breakfast, Jesus and Peter find a moment alone, face to face and Jesus looks Peter in the eyes and asks: "Peter do you love me?" Jesus doesn't ask: "Are you sorry Peter, for what you've done? Do you promise never to do it again?" No... he asks: "Peter do you love me?" It is an extraordinarily tender question and Jesus, in asking it puts his heart on the line! Jesus, now, here, in these moments asks: "Ilan, do you love me?"

Do you...love me? This is the invitation of the second chance. Jesus asks Peter three times: "Do you love me?" Peter probably doesn't realise it, but Jesus in asking three times 'Do you love me?' is bringing about the healing of Peter's greatest failure. Three times he denied Jesus, three times he declares his love. This is really beautiful, it is really powerful and it is really wonderful. Jesus meets Peter right in the middle of his greatest failure. He knows the truth about Peter and meets him anyway.

Then he invites him back into the game. "Peter," he says, "tend my lambs, shepherd my sheep, tend my sheep. Peter, I'm not giving up on you, I love you far too much for that. Peter, you may feel like the greatest failure, you may feel worthless and you may think I will abandon you, but you have not reached the end of my love." Jesus is in the business of meeting people over charcoal fires – not literally, but you understand the point. Is it possible that he is waiting to meet you, if only you will face the truth about yourself and walk up the beach?

There's an important thing you need to know about mulligans. You can't take a mulligan in golf when the game really matters: there are no mulligans in a competition or in professional golf. That's because the integrity of the game matters. And there are things in life that matter, they really matter. And God's love, that you can never find the end of, is not a love that just doesn't care - it's not that our failures don't matter or count for anything! And God's love isn't about pretending that some things didn't really happen.

In golf, you keep score, and the score matters, and someone has to keep score. If there is love, then there must be justice. The prophet Amos tells us that one day justice will roll like a river, righteousness like a never ending stream (Amos 5 v 24). We will be held to account – we'll sign the score card. God's great love leads him to forgive and the place where love, forgiveness and justice come together... is the cross.

The cross declares to us God's hatred for sin and the damage it does. The cross declares the magnitude of God's love and his insatiable appetite to forgive and redeem those who fail.

Meeting Jesus over at the charcoal fire could have been the hardest thing Peter ever did, but it was also the best thing he ever did. For this is where he faced the truth about himself, and the truth about himself in God's eyes. When they met that morning for breakfast, Jesus had not long been to the cross. There he died for Peter's greatest failure and for all the truth of who Peter was, and there he died so he could rise three days later for Peter's greatest moment and for all the truth of who Peter could be!

He met Peter on the beach so he could extend the invitation of the second chance. And his invitation of the second chance extends to you. If you meet him on the beach you will find his love has no limit, his grace has no measure, his power has no boundary. He has a fire ready – he is just waiting for you!

The letter today is in the form of a song.

It's Alright

Oh I know that you've been hurting,

Oh I know the tears you've cried,

I've felt the pain that hiding,

I know the way you feel inside.

It's alright, it's alright, it's alright.

Oh I know you think you've failed me,

You think you've let me down again,

Oh you feel so unworthy,

You feel ashamed of all your sin.

It's alright, it's alright, it's alright.

Can't you see that I love you?

Don't you know I'm always near?

Oh my child you're so precious,

There's no need for you to fear.

It's alright, it's alright, 'cause I love you

It's alright, it's alright, and I'm with you

It's alright, it's alright, it's alright.

Preached in Crawley Baptist Church on Sunday 19th November 2017, by Rev. Ian Phillips.