



Reflection #19

There is a small basalt church beside the Sea of Galilee. This is the traditional site where the events of John 21 took place.

In the last chapter of John, the disciples, led by Peter, decide to go fishing. As they are fishing without any luck a person from the shore chides them and tells them they should cast their nets on the other side of the boat. They do and catch a great haul. Peter and John realize this must be Jesus.

Peter jumps into the water and swims ashore. What follows is a scene of agonizing silence. John records no words between Peter and the resurrected Jesus all the while the disciples are hauling in the catch and rowing ashore. The only description is that Jesus was standing in front of a charcoal fire. The only other mention of a charcoal fire in all of scripture is the one Peter stood beside when he denied Jesus three times.

After everyone is ashore there is another tense moment. This time it is a series of questions: Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? Jesus asks Peter three times and with each question the agony of the question reaches deeper and deeper.

The church of the Primacy is meant to enshrine this moment. Unlike most churches in the Holy Land, this one has no miracle, no teachings, no birth or death. This is a church about forgiveness. The church of the Primacy is a moment in our journey to pause and inquire: what does it mean for me to forgive and be forgiven?

This is a good moment to see and understand that a pilgrim's path is to prepare the heart for new life. No greater preparation can be found than to discover the true challenge of mercy and grace. We use the words with great ease and toss them about as if they were easy to do. Here, though, we are confronted by the depth of challenge real forgiveness demands. If we are to be forgiven, we must be prepared to love.

So many of the sites we will visit are about historic events, miracles, or profound moments in life. The church of the Primacy is meant to convey just the opposite. What if the most important moments in life are found in the everyday, the mundane, the Tuesdays and Wednesdays?

As you can see from the photos, the church is not a soaring cathedral, nor does it embody the mystery of light and darkness, and there is no shrine with icons. And this is not an acoustically perfect church or a world event filled with global art. This is a simple church in a quiet spot. It is one of my favorite places in Galilee. Although it is built upon a hard moment, there is such grace and beauty here.