

A young man named Chad was released from serving 18 months in prison for all sorts of petty crimes. As he left, he had resolved that he was too young, with too much life ahead of him, to throw it all away. He planned to turn things around, hoping for a second chance; and for that, he needed to find a decent job. He looked through a whole bunch of online ads and, after years of selling drugs, any other work seemed respectable. He was prepared to try anything.

He went to dozens of interviews, but every time it inevitably came up that he had done time in prison. The interview would end shortly thereafter and there was never a call back. One day, he went and interviewed at a scrap yard. The manager looked over his eyeglasses at Chad and swinging his feet off the desk, he leaned forward and asked point blank with his finger pointed right at him, "You got a criminal record?" The young man looked down in shame and simply nodded his head. After a long pause, the manager said, "You start tomorrow. Come around back with me and I'll show you the yard."

Chad couldn't believe his ears; he had been honest, but this man was willing to give him a chance. As they left the building and entered the fenced in back yard, Chad was instantly filled with fear. He recognized that yard- he had busted in there two years ago, stole some copper wire and just for fun, started a big fire in the middle of the yard. In fact, he could see the whole side of one building still stained with smoke and soot. The manager gave him a key and said he would see him in the morning.

All night long, Chad was tormented at the thought of going back to a place he had violated to actually earn a living off of the unwitting victim. He had not been arrested or charged for that crime. He arrived to the yard bright and early, ready to work. It was mostly all manual labor cleaning up and sorting the yard. The manager was quiet and gave him plenty of room to do his work. They would take their lunch together and it turned out his manager was a pretty funny guy. It didn't take long for Chad to not only look up to him, but actually consider him a friend. However, the whole while long, he was grieved by his secret.

One day over lunch, the manager asked Chad, "So what are you trying to do with your life now?" Chad answered, "I've hurt a lot of people and wasted a ton of time. I hope I can just honestly start making up for some of it." Finally, he blurted out, "Actually, I've been meaning to tell you something. I don't deserve this job. I was the guy, two years ago, who broke in, stole your stuff and set the fire." There, he had finally come clean.

Chad's manager just looked at him with his serious but gentle face. He stood up and said, "Come to my office, I want to show you something." The manager fired up an outdated computer and waved Chad to come around his desk and stand beside him. Chad went around and looked at the screen. His manager pressed a button and then video surveillance film started to play. A guy was pouring a jerry can of gas over everything in a pile he had made and then struck a match and threw it on the pile. He backed away from the flames, turned around looked up into the security camera, made an obscene gesture, zipped

up his hoodie and took off. There was no mistaking the man in the video footage; Chad was looking at himself in that screen. He turned to his manager who was staring up at him with a sly grin on his face. Chad was speechless.

His manager let out a little chuckle, stood up and patted Chad on the back. "I've waited two years to catch that guy," he said, "and I finally got him. Let's get back to work." Dumbfounded, Chad followed him out of the office, confused by what had just happened. His manager had known all along that he hired the perpetrator of a crime against him? In that moment, it finally dawned on him what a second chance looks like. A quiet grin crept across his face and he followed his manager back out into the yard. He worked harder and longer that afternoon than he ever had in his life...

You don't need a criminal record for this story to resonate. There is not a soul on this planet who has not experienced guilt. A fortunate number of souls have also experienced freedom from that guilt by someone who was willing to give them a second chance; the willingness to look beyond shortcomings and see potential. This is precisely the experience of Peter as we heard it in today's gospel. When our Lord worked that miracle in Peter's fishing boat, his mind was flooded by memories of all the ways he had offended God before- and now God just did something magnificent for him. "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." In that statement, Peter does not tell Jesus anything that He did not already know. But that didn't stop Him from calling that fisherman to become a fisher-of-men.

St. John Paul II ended his homily at World Youth Day in Toronto by saying, "We are not the sum of our weaknesses and failures; we are the sum of the Father's love for us and our real capacity to become the image of his Son." We are reminded of that again today. Our God is the God of second, third, and *hundredth* chances; our God is the God of new beginnings. There is absolutely nothing in our lives that can prevent us from accomplishing great things for Him, so long as we let Him take the lead.

The desire for greatness is planted within each of our hearts. When we are raised by loving and hardworking parents, that desire is naturally fostered and promoted. Unfortunately, the lies and disappointments of this world are often louder than that quiet voice in our hearts and the encouragement of our families and friends to achieve that potential of which we know we are capable. That potential is what we call our vocation- that unique call from God to which we must respond if we are ever to ascend to those heights of greatness for which we were made. Today, like Chad from the story; like Peter in the boat on the Sea of Galilee; we must not let the disappointments and failures of our past keep us from saying yes to becoming what Christ Himself has drawn near to us and asked from us. We have only to say yes...