

“Do You Love Me?”

John 21:1-19

22 April 2007

The Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor
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After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will go with you.” They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” They answered him, “No.” He said to them, “Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off. When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, “Who are you?” because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

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.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” A second time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.” (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, “Follow me.”

Prayer.

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Taken out of context
 “Do you love me?”
 sounds more like an uncertain
 suitor
 than the words of a risen Savior.
 “Do you love me?”
 the soap opera diva asks.
 “Packing my bags and moving out
 means we have a great future
 ahead of us”
 comes the sarcastic reply,
 causing the audience to chuckle.

“Do you love me?”
 has the tone,
 at the risk of being labeled “sexist”
 of commitment sought by a young
 woman
 but feared by a young man.

“Do you love me?”
 cuts right to the chase
 cuts right to the core
 causes the whole creation
 to come to a screeching halt
 all of humanity to wait in
 uncomfortable silence
 a pregnant pause
 knowing that the reply
 will cause the future
 to become forever changed.

“Do you love me?”
 A “no” results in a complete and
 utter cut
 a discontinuance of the relationship
 an abrupt and uncomfortable end.
 Unrequited love is a painful thing;
 to watch love given
 without any hope of
 any of it being returned;
 it is the futile efforts
 of one in denial,
 who has been told no,

but who continues the pursuit
 anyway.

“No” wasn’t an option for Peter,
 for one who had been so completely
 groomed over the past three years,
 prepared for a lifetime
 of Christ-following,
 Spirit-driven,
 missionary service.
 Though Peter had
 so often disappointed,
 Jesus saw qualities
 the casual readers of the gospel
 never recognize.
 Peter’s failures
 Jesus turned upside down
 and used as strengths;
 “teachable moments”
 an old professor once told me,
 turning experience into wisdom
 and shoring up the foundation
 upon which Jesus would build his
 church.
 Three times Peter denied Jesus,
 three times Peter affirms
 his eternal love for our resurrected
 Lord.
 That’s something that can’t be taken
 back.
 That’s something to build on.

Likewise,
 “no,” isn’t an option for you or me,
 either.
 God hasn’t brought us
 through trial and storm
 to be seated in these pews this day
 only to have us hold off the
 inevitable;
 which is our complete
 conversion, repentance, and
 redemption -
 the death of our bodies,

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and the eternal resurrection of our souls.

God will not take your "no."
It may not seem fair,
but a "no" to God
only let's loose
His hounds of heaven
who will hunt you down
all your living days
who will never give up on you
will never give in
until we answer in the affirmative,
"Yes Lord. You know I love you,"
forever changing the world.

"Do you love me?"
"Yes, Lord. You know I love you,"
stammers the embarrassed Peter,
caught returning to his old ways;
fishing with friends.
He had thrown on cloths
reminiscence of Adam and Eve's
gaff in the garden.
Such is the fate
when words say one thing
and actions say something else.
Note to self;
don't do the same.
Twice the witness of Christ's
resurrection
Three times the one
who denied knowing him.
Even still Peter and company
walk 90 miles north
as if it never happened.

"Feed my lambs."
"Tend my sheep."
"Feed my sheep."
Action words
that commission
disciples of Christ
to actually do something
about faith.

It's not enough to talk the talk,
you've got to walk the walk.

"Yes Lord," each of us proclaim,
"we love you,
yes we do."
Tend and feed
Christ's sheep,
those who God created
in the image of a loving
heavenly Father.
Tend and feed
Christ's sheep,
people like those who caused
Jesus
to stop cold in his tracks,
heckled by a crazy blind man.
Tend and feed
Christ's sheep,
especially the vulnerable,
the unclean,
the sick, prisoner, and sojourner.
Tend and feed
those who have not heard his
name,
who wouldn't know grace
if it hit them right between the eyes.
Tend and feed
not only on Sundays
but every other day of the week.
Tend and feed
standing upon the shoulders
of saints who have gone on before
us.
Tend and feed
because we are Zion,
we are the church of Peter
built on the solid rock
of Jesus Christ.

Tend and feed Christ's lambs
Jesus commissions
each of us this morning.
No is not an option.

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“Yes Lord, you know we love you”
is our only reply.
May it be so.
May it be so.
Amen.