

"If You Love Me..... "
C Easter 3; John 21:1-19
May 5, 2019; 10:00 am
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
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21 ¹⁻³ After this, Jesus appeared again to the disciples, this time at the Tiberias Sea (the Sea of Galilee). This is how he did it: Simon Peter, Thomas (nicknamed "Twin"), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the brothers Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. Simon Peter announced, "I'm going fishing."

³⁻⁴ The rest of them replied, "We're going with you." They went out and got in the boat. They caught nothing that night. When the sun came up, Jesus was standing on the beach, but they didn't recognize him.

⁵ Jesus spoke to them: "Good morning! Did you catch anything for breakfast?"
They answered, "No."

⁶ He said, "Throw the net off the right side of the boat and see what happens."
They did what he said. All of a sudden there were so many fish in it, they weren't strong enough to pull it in.

⁷⁻⁹ Then the disciple Jesus loved said to Peter, "It's the Master!"

When Simon Peter realized that it was the Master, he threw on some clothes, for he was stripped for work, and dove into the sea. The other disciples came in by boat for they weren't far from land, a hundred yards or so, pulling along the net full of fish. When they got out of the boat, they saw a fire laid, with fish and bread cooking on it.

¹⁰⁻¹¹ Jesus said, "Bring some of the fish you've just caught." Simon Peter joined them and pulled the net to shore—153 big fish! And even with all those fish, the net didn't rip.

¹² Jesus said, "Breakfast is ready." Not one of the disciples dared ask, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Master.

¹³⁻¹⁴ Jesus then took the bread and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus had shown himself alive to the disciples since being raised from the dead.

Do You Love Me?

¹⁵ After breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"
"Yes, Master, you know I love you."
Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

¹⁶ He then asked a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"

“Yes, Master, you know I love you.”
Jesus said, “Shepherd my sheep.”

17-19 Then he said it a third time: “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was upset that he asked for the third time, “Do you love me?” so he answered, “Master, you know everything there is to know. You’ve got to know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. I’m telling you the very truth now: When you were young you dressed yourself and went wherever you wished, but when you get old you’ll have to stretch out your hands while someone else dresses you and takes you where you don’t want to go.” He said this to hint at the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. And then he commanded, “Follow me.”

CHANGE IN STATUS

There’s a clever meme going around the internet in this Easter season. Several disciples are standing at the mouth of the empty tomb, and the one standing at the opening has an iPad in his hand. He declares:

“He’s not in there. Oh wait!
He’s changed his status to “Risen.”

A few weeks later, in our story from the Gospel of John, someone else’s status is changed. Remember Peter? Remember how he stood around the fire on that cold night outside the trial of Jesus, and the women tending the fire accused him: “You’re one of his followers, *aren’t* you?!”

And Peter cowered in fear and let out a weak, “I don’t know him.” And, the woman and others around pushed harder: “You are not *also* one of his disciples, are you?” “I am *not*,” Peter replied. And then a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off asked, “Did I not see you in the garden with him?” Peter *again* denied it, and the cock crowed.

Now, on this early morning at the Sea of Tiberias, the disciples are weary and discouraged – having been out all night, *trying* to fish, but *fishing* was all they were doing. *Catching* was not happening—no matter how hard and where they tried.

Jesus appears on the beach—unrecognized at first—and hollers out to them: “Try the other side, boys!” And soon the nets were so full they threatened to capsize the boat. Someone realized in that moment of heavenly abundance who they were dealing with, and hollered out, “It is the Lord!”

Peter, throws his clothes on and jumps into the sea! He’s obviously still not thinking clearly, do you think?! How often do you put clothes *on* before jumping in the water?!

And breakfast on the beach, prepared and spread by none other than the Risen Christ continues this holy celebration. New life! New hope. New relationship reborn.

PICTURE FROM HOLY LAND

In the holy land is an ancient church, Church of the Primacy of St. Peter, they call it. The Church is literally right at the shore. The entry way slopes down to a rocky beach with the waves lapping up in a little curved cove. I found it profoundly moving.

There weren't a bunch of tourists around that day – just our group walking quietly around, pondering in our thoughts this incredible, life-and-world-changing moment: the heartrending scene of Peter and Jesus, coming back together, restoring their relationship. Peter feeling beyond sheepish; sorrowful that he had bailed on his friend in his hour of need. Denied his Lord and then hidden in fear.

And now, he doesn't know what he will find, but what he finds is incredibly heart *warming*. For Jesus doesn't judge. He opens his arms, welcomes him back into the fold and calls him to lead the team.

“Do you love me, Peter?” Not an inquisition. Not a grilling. No mention, really of dismay over that agonizing denial –not once, but three times.

Do you? If you love me, then feed my sheep. I've got work for you to do. “Yes, Lord: you know that I love you.” “Then feed my lambs.” And three times this banter goes back and forth. Not that Jesus needed to say it three times for his own reassurance, but that Peter needed to believe it in his ears and deep down in his own heart. Three times denied; three times forgiven and commissioned.

Jesus changed Peter's status that day. From “Denier” to “Shepherd of my Sheep.” From “Coward” to “Called.” Jesus didn't allow Peter to wallow in the past, stew in his sins, shirk his responsibility to carry on the message and ministry because he'd had a moment or 20 of weakness and doubt.

He had a job to do and Jesus wanted him to get on with it. “Don't wallow in what's past, Peter. Get on with serving and feeding.”

DO YOU LOVE JESUS?

Do you love Jesus? Have you been forgiven for your shortcomings, your past mistakes, your times of denial and betrayal? The old spiritual asks the question:

“Christian, do you love my Jesus?”

Christian, do you love my Jesus?

If you love him, why not serve him?

What does loving Jesus and answering the call to “feed my lambs” look like for us?

a) Good Samaritans of all kinds

It might look like a panhandler becoming a Good Samaritan. On I-70! Where you'd least expect it, from the least likely corner. But that's where it happened just last week.

Darin Barton was panhandling near the scene when the fiery crash on I-70 happened. He told CNN that when the cab of

the truck rolled over and flames ignited, he quickly dropped the sign he was holding and ran toward the cars.

"It just caught on fire. And I just dropped my sign, took off running," Barton said. "As soon as I (saw) flames, I headed under the bridge, grabbed three or four people out of a couple cars."

“Do you love me?” Then recognize the Christ in every soul you encounter.” Remember – the Good Samaritan Jesus talked about was from across the tracks or under the overpass too. See the potential in every person, no matter how unlikely, to be a helper.

b) Good Samaritan might have 4 legs—visiting horse

Every morning in Frankfurt, Germany, you might catch a glimpse of Jenny, a horse who goes on a long walk every morning, all by herself. She has been taking the same route every morning for 14 years, ever since her owner, now 79 years old, became unable to ride. She enjoys greeting all of the familiar faces along the way, and she stops and gets treats and pettings from some of her favorite humans. The locals treat her like a celebrity and happily clean up after her.

A piece of paper is attached to her halter that reads, "My name is Jenny. I didn't run away, I'm just walking. Thank you." But the police get calls frequently from people who don't know about the arrangement. They are very familiar with the horse and the owner, and there have been no incidents in 14 years. A local veterinarian gives her routine checkups and continues to find her to be healthy and showing no anxiety about her unique lifestyle.

Do you love me? Then connect in meaningful ways with all creatures great and small. With one another. With the birds of the air and the beasts of the field.

c) UMC Youth stand up to discrimination:

That connecting with all might require *dis*-connecting ourselves from discrimination.

(RNS) — United Methodists across the US have protested the global denomination's crackdown on LGBTQ members in all kinds of ways.

But now a group of teens in a confirmation class at a historic United Methodist church in Omaha has taken the unprecedented step of refusing to join the church.

Eight teenagers, aged 13 and 14 – this year's confirmation class—stood before the congregation on Confirmation Sunday (April 28) and read a letter saying they do not want to become members at this time.

The teens said they took their stand on principle because they believed the denomination's vote to uphold and strengthen its ban on LGBTQ ordination and marriage to be “immoral” and “unjust.”

“We are concerned that if we join at this time, we will be sending a message that we approve of this decision.”

The eight teens received a standing ovation. As is customary following confirmation, the church treated the youth to dinner: lasagna and salad and a gift of journals for

each teen. This is the first known refusal to join the church at the end of confirmation, a formal rite of passage.

The pastor and associate pastor responded:

“We are in full support of their decision,” he said. “We’re proud of them. It’s not an easy thing to do to resist.”

“Do you love me,” asks Jesus. “Then speak truth to power, like I did when I walked among you. If you love me, stand up. *Resist* oppression, discrimination and evil. Even IN the church. Turn the other cheek like I said – not that you should be a doormat, but resist, protest and defy in ways that get their attention!”

SEEDS SPRINGING FORTH

Easter Sunday we celebrated new life springing forth – not just for Jesus bursting out of the grave and leading us *all* out of places of death. But the seeds that are planted in each of us and are now springing forth, looking for new life and purpose.

What have *you* been planted for? The seed is germinating and now is coming to life. What darkness and doubt, denial and regret need to be left in the soil tomb and put behind you, so you can spring forth like Peter into new life, new hope and new direction?

“Do you love me, Peter? You denied me before but I know your heart. We’ve all been to the tomb, planted in the grave, and now we’re all rising together.”

We have work to do, life to live and love to give!! Do you love me, Christian? Feed my lambs. Feed the

hungry. Clothe the naked, care for the poor –not just with a handout, but with a complete overhaul of the system that keeps them poor and hungry.

Remember on Easter morning, Peter *did* jump in and take action. He didn’t just dis-believe the women. A seed was planted in him. He ran to the tomb to see for himself.

And then, Jesus changed Peter’s status that day by the shore. Forgiveness and reconciliation changes our status as well.

Today is Step 2. Reconciliation and restoration of relationship. Reach out to Jesus. Jump out of the boat and swim toward the Lord!

Marilyn and Molly shared in moving ways last week what it means to them to follow Jesus. What is *your* testimony?

FISH STORIES/GET OUT OF THE BOAT

A profound and gifted follower of Jesus died yesterday. Far too young and not done yet in her life and witness to the faith. Rachel Held Evans, prophetess, sage, author and teacher, died at age 37 from a severe reaction to antibiotics given for a common infection.

Rachel lived her life a lot like Peter – jumping in, asking questions, giving faith and all the struggles that come with it her all. This story of Jesus and Peter on the beach is one of her favorites and she wrote

about it in *Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again*.

(Reflection on John 21 by Rachel Held Evans)

COME TO BREAKFAST ON THE BEACH!

“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 the *third* time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Let us gather at the Table.

Responding to the call –responding to the forgiveness we have been shown, the reconciliation we are offered in Christ – with God and one another, and answer the question Jesus puts to all of us: Do you love me?

Then feed my lambs. Take this bread, break it and share it and pour out the cup of my love. Do this in remembrance of me and do it often. By this shall all people know that you are my disciples – if you love and feed one another and go out into the world loving, feeding, serving. Amen.

