

**SERMON – THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER**  
**JOHN 21:1-18**  
**MAY 5, 2019**

**“DO YOU LOVE ME? FOLLOW ME”**

Do you love me? Do you really love me? If you love me, are you even my friend? If Jesus was standing in front of us like he was with Peter, how would we respond to each of the three questions? Remember, Jesus is searching our hearts for our true answers. More on this later in the sermon.

Grace and peace from God our father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Two weeks ago, we had a glorious celebration of an Easter sunrise visit at the empty tomb where Jesus was buried. But what happens the next regular day after all the celebration of Easter is over? After Jesus rode from the dead, life for the disciples would never be the same. Jesus' appearances and conversations during this time following the resurrection would answer some questions, but it would also open the door to many others. Wow. The disciples are now walking on uncharted territory, living in a post-Easter world. In simple words, the disciples were scared, lost and did not know what to do. Sometimes when life is turned upside down, people resort to doing what they know and feel most comfortable with. For the disciples and Simon Peter, that meant returning to business as usual - which was fishing.

What business? When we return to business as usual, Easter often recedes into the background, or as some say, 'takes a back seat'. The routine often discourages us. We may feel cut off from a close relationship with the risen Christ. Is this how we felt the next day? Or the week after Easter Sunday?

As some of the disciples joined Peter to fish and get back to a routine, they found on that night as they threw out their nets, no one caught anything. Nothing. Zero. How discouraging!

As the discouraged and tired disciples were coming back from fishing, they saw a sunrise visitor - a man standing on the shore. It was Jesus and he appeared to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberius in Galilee where He first called Simon Peter to be His disciple. As the disciples came to shore, this sunrise visitor asks the disciples to go back out and try once more. He told them where to cast their nets - on the right side of the boat. So the very tired and discouraged disciples went out one last time to fish, following the directions of the sunrise visitor. After casting the nets, they were amazed at the large number of fish filling their nets. So many fish that their nets were starting to break when coming back to shore.

The risen Christ appears at sunrise, unrecognized on a routine day, to help with a routine problem. Note the response of two disciples: Peter did not realize the fishing advisor was Jesus himself. Only John, Jesus' beloved disciple, had spiritual insight to figure it out and say, "It is the Lord" and recognize Jesus in the dim morning light. But good old Peter who was naked put on his clothes, took spiritual action by jumping into the water and headed for shore. When the risen Christ appears to us on our ordinary days, God first gives us spiritual insight to see Him as our loving powerful Lord and Savior. He also moves us to spiritual action by making us eager to respond to His call; Jesus will help us with our daily problems. Through regular worship, prayer and study of the Word, we recognize Him. Through attention to the needs of others, we save Him.

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Then the risen Christ and the hard-working disciples shared a breakfast reunion, with a meal prepared by Jesus. The disciples felt strengthened. This was the third appearance by Jesus to His disciples, yet no one asked Him who he was, because His identity was clear.

After breakfast, Jesus gives Peter a pop quiz of three questions that were brief and direct. Remember Peter had been fishing all night and was very tired and frustrated from a night of catching no fish. Jesus asked Peter the same question three times because He wanted to know, “Do you love me?”, which is a type of questions deserving a “yes” or “no” response.

At the beach, Jesus led Peter through an experience that would remove the cloud of his denial when he denied Jesus three times. Now on the beach, three times Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him. Peter affirmed his love for Jesus by saying ‘yes’ after each question. Jesus responded to Peter by giving him the following tasks: Feed my lambs; Tend my sheep; and Feed my sheep.

It is one thing to say we love you, Jesus, but the real test is our willingness to serve Him. Peter had repented and now Jesus was asking him to commit his life. Peter’s life changed when he finally realized who Jesus was. Have our lives changed when we really realized who Jesus was? Peter’s occupation then changed from fisherman to evangelist. His ID changed from action/not thinking to “ROCK”. His relationship to Jesus changed because he was forgiven and he finally understood the significance of Jesus’ words, death and resurrection. Do we, like Peter get it and really understand? Do we?

Now to the three questions I asked as the start of this sermon. Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him. The first time Jesus asked him, “Do you love me more than yourself?” Here we use the Greek word AGAPE, meaning self-sacrifice or general love. The second time, Jesus focused on Peter alone by asking: “Do you really love me?” Here we use AGAPE love again, but this time meaning personal love. The third time, Jesus used the Greek word PHILEO, meaning brotherly love and asked Peter if you love me, “are you even my friend”? Jesus used three different meanings of love in each question.

Each time Peter responded “yes” affirmed that Jesus does not settle for quick superficial answers. This means He will not settle for single shallow answers because He has a way of getting to the heart of the matter. Peter had to face his true feelings and motives when Jesus confronted him. That is why we said be careful how you answer because Jesus is searching our hearts for our true feelings and motives.

Jesus also foretold the type of martyr’s death of Peter by crucifixion. Tradition says Peter was crucified for his faith upside down because he did not feel worthy of dying like Jesus did. From all this, Jesus still told Peter to follow Him, no matter what his future held. That is really true faith and love.

Our sunrise encounter with the risen Christ helps us remember our fellowship at the altar and anticipate the heavenly feast. Jesus fills our routine with the joy of Easter Morning. We may be uncertain and fearful about our own future, but if we know God is in control, we have confidence following Christ.

Do you love me? Feed my lambs. Do you really love me? Tend my sheep. If you love me, are you even my friend? Feed my sheep. AMEN.