

Scripture: John 21:1-19 New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

21 After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he showed himself in this way. **2** Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin,^[a] Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. **3** 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.

4 Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach, but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. **5** Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." **6** 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. **7** That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he had taken it off, and jumped into the sea. **8** 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.

9 When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. **10** Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." **11** 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. **12** 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. **13** Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them and did the same with the fish. **14** This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

15 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." **16** 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." **17** 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. **18** 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." **19** (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

Sermon:**Do you love me?****Pastor Bob**

I am sure many of you are familiar with the musical, “Fiddler on the Roof”. My favorite character role is Tevye, the overthinking, hyper-protective father role that I still feel somehow destined for. Sometimes I wonder if I could have been one of the bottle dancers in the big wedding scene and, of course, the Rabbi.

There are many songs in the production that are wonderful – “If I Were a Rich Man,” “Matchmaker,” “Sunrise, Sunset,” but I think that my favorite – or at least the one that holds a special place in my heart, is “Do You Love Me?” It’s a tender, short little conversation between Tevye and Golde, his spouse. After all of the chaos around his daughter’s marriage and her rejection of tradition in the name of her heart, Tevye is overthinking about love and begins to wonder about his own marriage. “Do you love me?”, he sings to Golde as she’s simply trying to get her chores done. “Do I love you?”, she fires back. What kind of a question is that?

*For twenty-five years, I’ve washed your clothes,
Cooked your meals, cleaned your house,
Given you children, milked the cow.
After twenty-five years, why talk about love right now?*

Tevye presses her further – talking about their own wedding, steeped in tradition, and the promise of their own parents that they would *grow* to love each other. So, he asks again – “Do you love me?”

*For twenty-five years, I’ve lived with him,
Fought with him, starved with him.
For twenty-five years, my bed is his.
If that’s not love, what is?*

Tevye, breaking into a big grin, says, “So, you love me?” And he sits by her on that same bed, her unfolded laundry in her lap and they both say those words – I love you – as they sing together, with an appropriate bit of harmony: It doesn’t change a thing, but even so, after twenty-five years, it’s nice to know. And, just as important, it will be the 25th anniversary for Sandy & I this June.

I am just as reminded of this scene, of course, of our scripture passage from John 21. We should notice that at no point in Jesus and Peter's love song does Peter use the method Golde, not saying why are you asking me this, Lord? Look at what I've *done*!

Instead, Peter uses a much more common technique – look at what I say, Lord! You want me to say it again? How about louder?

Jesus replies to Peter by saying it again – do you Love me? He pushes Peter, asking three times not only, I think, because that's a very biblical thing to do – things often happen in threes – but also because he believes that

- Peter is not really getting it.
- Peter, is conveniently forgetting the number of times
- Peter thinks he has a special role.

Jesus makes it clearer by switching his language from word to deed and says, “OK, I’ll take you at face value, Peter. I’ll trust you. So, *if* you love me...feed my sheep.”

A shepherd is the role that helps us embrace the image of seeking out the missing, rescuing those in danger, feeding them and leading them to life-giving ways, caring for the sick, and giving strength to the weak.

But make no mistake. “Feed my sheep,” is not a soft ask. The sheep of Jesus always seem to graze on the other side of those fences we’ve established. They live on the across the tracks, on the other bank of the river or bay, on the other side of the wall.

Barbara Brown Taylor says we turn this ask for love into a “lambs and rainbows” moment, as if Jesus is asking us to just be “nice” to each other. It’s a vague, beneficial feeling towards others. There’s no cost, no surrender, no change or transformation. It’s “don’t worry, be happy” on an endless loop, when it’s really troubled a lot, by a Gospel that is both comforting and disruptive, grace-filled and demanding, all at the same time.

What Jesus is asking Peter for – again and again and again – is to give the kind of love he has given. He’s asking him to not only see “the other,” and to love “the other,” but to be willing to give, to sacrifice, for “the other.” It’s a dangerous and bold ask, which is why he asks Peter so many times. Peter’s yes, Jesus realizes, is to something different, and Jesus wants to make sure he knows what he’s saying yes to and what he is getting himself into. There is an important distinction between what Peter calls love and what Jesus calls love. When Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love me?”, he is really asking him to *show it and do it*, not just say it.

Tevye and Golde have a lesson for us as well. Anyone can say, “I love you,” but can they show it, and will they do it? Can they say, “I love you,” without saying a word? And then, you can also show your love over and over and forget to say it. See, we need both. We live in a time in which a cultural Christianity makes a claim on those words – say you love Jesus, and you can go on about your business, without regard for the missing, the wounded, the hungry, the sick, or the weak. It’s a claim on power, without the vulnerability of need or weakness. For such a claim, Jesus would ask again, and again, and again – do you love me? And then says to us, feed my sheep.

This is the beginning of trust, to know both sides of this – the word and the deed, the promise and the action, the Christ and the Christian. And Jesus knows that trust is a better compliment than love, so he seeks from his disciples that trust – which is only created when actions meet words. Jesus’ resurrection call is aspirational...we hear the words, we share the dream, we take the action. He has to ask Peter again and again and again because he wants to make sure that Peter – and by extension all of us – is connecting himself to Love –

- Love that will make demands
- Love that will make us change our minds and hearts
- Love that we will be subject to, not the other way around

There is a wisdom in this seaside appearance of Jesus – that we, like Peter, might come to understand that we need both a rigorous, active faith.

- The faith that comes from within us
- A faith that is something to which we are subject
- A Christ who has risen
- A God who did the raising

So that there is a name to evoke against the power and evil and injustice in the world, we will not feel alone and that those iniquities will never prevail.

Like Peter, we can understand that faith is something we live. Like Peter, we need to both love Christ and Love *like* Christ. We must have both so that God's miracles don't become so miraculous as to be useless...they must live *in* us and *through* us to be of any good.

It's the words that may connect and inspire us, but it's the deeds that will transform us. When Golde says, "I love you," it's because of the work of those deeds on her own heart, and when Tevye repeats it back, it's for the same reason. They have grown a love out of action, which is something that faith actually lives for...it is the *work* of faith.

May that work of Love be with us, through us, and shown to everyone we meet. Thanks be to God. Amen.