

I.N.I.

Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 20, 2017
John 21:15-19

In Christ Jesus, our Loving Lord and Savior, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

In our second scripture reading this morning we heard of our Savior's third meeting with His disciples since His resurrection. We heard how Jesus appeared on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and how He once again filled the disciples nets to overflowing with fish. John was the first to realize that it was the Lord. When Peter heard this he immediately dove into the water, leaving the boats behind and made his way to the shore. Once there, as we heard, Jesus had already prepared for them a breakfast meal of bread and fish.

Sometime after the meal Jesus approached Peter and spoke to him. No doubt these past few weeks had been especially hard on Peter. He knew how much he had failed His Lord on that Friday morning. He remembered how he had cursed and swore that he did not even know Jesus. He was so afraid for his life that he denied His Lord three times in front of the crowd of people in the courtyard. That day probably seemed like an eternity ago; yet no doubt the memory of that day was with him everyday.

So many things had happened since that time. Immediately following his third denial, Jesus, who was being moved from one trial to another, looked at Peter. Peter ran out of the courtyard and in bitter tears repented of his sin. Not once, or twice, but three times he denied knowing His Lord and Savior, all because he was afraid of Jesus' enemies and cared more for his own life. He had trusted in his own bravery, strength, courage and faith. He did not rely on His Savior and His Word.

Then Easter Sunday morning Peter saw the empty tomb; sometime later Jesus appeared to Him; that night Peter was with the disciples when Jesus appeared to them in the room; 8 days later he again was with the disciples when Jesus again appeared to the group, as we heard last Sunday. Now once again Peter is with some of the disciples as Jesus again appears to them. But all during this time, during these meetings, as far as we know, Jesus never once mentioned Peter's falling away. As far as we know, Jesus never rebuked Peter, never admonished him or expressly spoke to him about it. I'm sure this bothered Peter. He no doubt wanted to forget the whole thing, but did he know how Jesus felt about him and his denial?

Jesus in His love puts to rest all of Peter's concern, doubt, anxiety, and fear. After breakfast Jesus asks Peter a very simple question, but let's note every word. **"SIMON, SON OF JONAH, DO YOU LOVE ME MORE THAN THESE?"** Did you notice that Jesus called him Simon, not Peter, the name Jesus had given to him? This no doubt was to show to Peter that he was not the "rock," which is what the name Peter means, that he thought he was. No, he was merely a man named Simon, son of a man named Jonah. The name Peter or rock, only applied to him when he put his trust and confidence in Jesus Christ, the solid ROCK! But now Jesus simply says; **SIMON, SON OF JONAH, DO YOU LOVE ME MORE THAN THESE?**

It is really unfortunate that our English language cannot break down these questions and answers of Jesus the way the original Greek does. Two different words for love are being used here in this question and answer. Jesus first uses the term **AGAPE**; the highest form of love there is; unselfish, serving, unconditional, not looking to one's own interest. We can get the flavor of this Greek word in John 3:16 **GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON.**

Here the word **AGAPE** is used. God didn't just "have affection for," or "like" the world as a friend. The world had sunk deep into the stench of sin and was repulsive to God, deserving of His wrath and damnation. The Holy God could never "like" or "have affection for" such a world. Yet, He loves all sinful people with a vast incomprehensible, unconditional love, a love that loves even the unlovable, loves even those repulsive to Him. And He loves them with a wondrous purpose in mind, as the rest of John 3:16 tells us, **THAT WHOSOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHALL NOT PERISH BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE.**

This same **AGAPE** love is used by Paul in I Cor. 13 when he writes, **LOVE IS PATIENT,**

LOVE IS KIND. IT DOES NOT ENVY, IT DOES NOT BOAST, IT IS NOT PROUD. IT IS NOT RUDE, IT IS NOT SELF-SEEKING, IT IS NOT EASILY ANGERED, IT KEEPS NO RECORD OF WRONGS. LOVE DOES NOT DELIGHT IN EVIL BUT REJOICES WITH THE TRUTH. IT ALWAYS PROTECTS, ALWAYS TRUSTS, ALWAYS HOPES, ALWAYS PERSEVERES. LOVE NEVER FAILS. That's **AGAPE** love. The love of those redeemed by Christ will reflect the undeserved love they have experienced from their God and Savior. John tells us in his first epistle **DEAR FRIENDS, SINCE GOD SO LOVED US, WE ALSO OUGHT TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER.**

Another example of this **AGAPE** love is when Jesus commands us to **LOVE OUR ENEMIES.** Jesus is not commanding you and me to be people who "like everybody" who are "friends with everybody." One man wrote, **ONLY A CHRISTIAN WHO HAS SHALLOW CONVICTIONS AND LOOSE PRINCIPLES CAN LIKE EVERYBODY.** Jesus here is commanding us to **LOVE EVERYBODY**, yes, even the open enemies of His gospel and His Church. Only by the power of His grace and the cross of Christ and His resurrection are we enabled to love them with a love strong enough to do good to them, to pray for them, and to work for their soul's salvation.

That's Jesus' question. Do you **LOVE** Me, Peter, with the highest form of devoted, dedicated, selfless love, even more than these? Peter knew at once what Jesus was referring to. He could not have forgotten his brash boast: **EVEN IF ALL FALL AWAY ON ACCOUNT OF YOU, I NEVER WILL.** In overwhelming pride Peter had exalted himself above his fellow Christian brothers. Jesus is now touching that sore spot of pride in Peter, not because He wants Peter to wince with pain, but in order to heal it and remove it.

Peter has learned. He meekly replies, **YES, LORD; YOU KNOW THAT I LOVE YOU.** But Peter uses the Greek word for love **PHILEO--HAVE AFFECTION FOR YOU, LIKE YOU AS A FRIEND.** Peter did not claim that he loved the Lord with that greatest kind of sacrificial love, the kind God had for him, nor did he dare to compare himself with the other disciples. He simply appeals to Jesus' omniscience and says **YOU KNOW I HAVE AFFECTION FOR YOU.** Peter has shifted the emphasis away from himself toward his Savior. The burning, painful memory of his shameful denial, to which the Lord was clearly alluding to in His question, would not allow Peter to claim anymore than that.

Jesus accepts the repentant Peter's humble confession and says **FEED MY LAMBS!** With these words Jesus did two things. First, He publicly declared that Peter's sin was fully pardoned. This was for Peter's sake and for the sake of the other disciples who might have wondered how Jesus felt about Peter. Jesus shows that Peter is completely forgiven. Second, by saying **FEED MY LAMBS,** Jesus was publicly reinstating Peter into his office as an apostle. Jesus had in effect done this on Easter evening when He called them to go out and preach the Easter message of **PEACE** and said, **AS THE FATHER HAS SENT ME, I ALSO SEND YOU!** Here, however, Jesus is speaking directly and personally to Peter. **"Yes, this means you too Peter."** This was also important for the rest of the disciples and the future generations of believers to know.

Notice that Jesus begins with the lambs. **"Feed (lit. PASTURE) My little ones."** Remember when the disciples had shown a low regard for the little children and encouraged the parents not to bring them to Jesus. Jesus was upset and rebuked them, **LET THE LITTLE CHILDREN COME TO ME, AND DO NOT FORBID THEM; FOR OF SUCH IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.** Jesus here shows that the little children were to have a prominent place in His Church and were to be fed the Word, nourishing their faith on a rich diet of God's forgiving love in Christ Jesus.

But now a second time Jesus asks Peter, **SIMON, SON OF JONAH, DO YOU LOVE ME?** Same words, same question, except without the words, **MORE THAN THESE.** Peter again humbly responds, **YES, LORD; YOU KNOW THAT I LOVE YOU.** Again the same words, you know that I have affection for You, I like You as a Friend. This time Jesus says, **TEND (lit. SHEPHERD) MY SHEEP!** Care for them, guide and lead them. Here Jesus calls them His sheep, all of them--both young and old--shepherd, lead the sheep as an under shepherd to Jesus the Good Shepherd.

And now a third time Jesus asks Peter, **SIMON, SON OF JONAH, DO YOU LOVE ME--HAVE AFFECTION FOR ME, LIKE ME AS A FRIEND?** Jesus now uses the term **PHILEO.**

Peter is crushed and grieved. Three times Jesus has publicly asked him, unmistakably reminding him of his three public denials of Him. Now Jesus has led Peter to three times publicly confess Him and profess his affection for the Lord. But I believe Peter was also grieved because the Lord found it necessary to even ask Him **DO YOU REALLY EVEN HAVE AFFECTION FOR ME?**

Remember how in his third denial Peter vehemently denied even knowing “this man” Jesus. How much affection and friendship, not to mention love was he showing toward his Lord then? **NONE WHATEVER!**

Jesus is not being mean or vindictive. He, in His great love for His own does not back off from hurting in order to heal. Jesus had great things in mind for Peter in His Church. He was to be a leader in bringing a bold confession to the world. His false confidence in his own strength almost cost him his soul. This dangerous self-confidence had to be purged from his heart before he would be fit for this task. Again Jesus says **FEED MY SHEEP!**

This Bible lesson has a very important application for the pastors and teachers of God's Word; for the shepherds of God's little lambs and sheep. If we put our confidence and trust in our own abilities and talents we will only fail in this service. But if our hope and confidence is in Jesus and the power of His Word, then He will work mightily through us to be the kind of shepherds and teachers He desires. We also see that **LOVE, AGAPE** love is what is an essential requirement for the office of shepherd of souls. The Lord Jesus directs this same question to us as His called servants; **DO YOU LOVE ME? DO YOU LOVE ME MORE THAN THESE?** Do you have that all sacrificing, selfless love for Me? Do you love Me more than this life--more than your family and friends--more than your cherished free time--more than your own life? Do you love Me with the kind of love that is willing to serve rather than be served, to give rather than be given to, to be obedient to My Word rather than be popular and well liked, to be selfless for the Gospel's sake? Jesus asked Peter 3 times, how often hasn't He asked us shepherds and teachers the same question. In your called service to Me **DO YOU REALLY LOVE ME?** Is that why you are doing what you do?

And the pastors and teachers of His Word, myself included, will have to admit that we too have failed as Peter and many times have denied our Lord by failing to love Him above everyone and everything else. That we too have become discouraged and downhearted when things didn't go the way we want, or the way we think they should. We have failed our Lord when we complain about the many tiring duties we have as shepherds and teachers, or when we go through the motions of our calling out of habit or a feeling of duty, rather than out of love. For this we repent and seek Jesus' forgiveness. And what a comfort it is to know that we are forgiven for such failures like Peter and that Jesus still calls us to **FEED** and **TEND** His lambs and sheep.

But this lesson also applies to all believers in Christ, not just pastors and teachers. Every Sunday in the relative comfort and security of our pews we confess our faith in Jesus Christ and our faithfulness to **FOLLOW HIM!** We profess our undying love for Him. Can we say as Peter did; **LORD, YOU KNOW ALL THINGS, YOU KNOW THAT I LOVE YOU?** Jesus can and does look into our hearts to see if saving faith is there and if it is alive and active. We see from this lesson that our hearts too, even though they are dedicated to serving the Lord Jesus are also filled with sin. We need to daily turn to the Lord Jesus, our Good Shepherd and confess our wanderings, our failures, our sins and trust in His forgiving love.

Our service to God begins and ends with **LOVE. WE LOVE HIM BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED US.** Because of His love, He lived and died for us, because of His love, He through the Holy Spirit gives us the gift of faith so that we in turn love Him. Paul says **THE LOVE OF CHRIST COMPELS US,** compels us to live our life for Him.

With this love which Christ has for us filling our hearts I as your pastor will be moved to strive to be ever more faithful in my calling to serve in love my Lord and bring to you the whole counsel of God's Word; to faithfully without compromise preach the Law which condemns and the beautiful Gospel of Forgiveness which saves. Our teachers will be moved by Christ's love for them to strive ever more faithfully to give of their time to serve in love their Lord in leading His little lambs to His Word and you will be moved by Christ's love to be ever more faithful in your shepherding of your little lambs at home and in directing and guiding your own lives into His Word in Church, in Bible Class, in your own personal and family devotions.

With Christ's love filling our hearts we too will see that the most important thing in our lives is our salvation from sin, death, Satan and hell. With this victory, Christ also gives us the ability to meet our daily chores and battles, to face our daily problems and dilemmas with a whole new outlook; **JESUS DIED FOR ME; HE HAS FORGIVEN ME; MY RESUURECTED AND LIVING GOOD SHEPHERD LOVES ME AND HAS CALLED ME TO FOLLOW HIM!** Then He will be living within us in His powerful Word and through His love move us to say:

TAKE MY LIFE AND LET IT BE, CONSECRATED LORD TO THEE;

TAKE MY MOMENTS AND MY DAYS LET THEM FLOW IN CEASELESS PRAISE.

TAKE MY LOVE MY LORD I POUR AT THY FEET ITS TREASURES STORE.

TAKE MYSELF AND I WILL BE EVER ONLY, ALL FOR THEE.

AMEN.