



United Methodist Church

OF GENEVA

Do you love me?

An Eastertide sermon by Pastor Rob Hamilton
Delivered on April 17, 2022

John 21:1-19- NRSV

1 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, 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 some clothes, for he was naked, 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."

Prayer of Illumination

Jesus,

You know that we love you, even if we don't always show it. As we engage this story of you and Peter, help us to find ourselves in this story and speak to our heart where we need it the most. Inspire my words and their hearing that we all may grow in love of you. Amen.

Sermon

When Andrew Collins took the oath to serve and protect the people Benton Harbor, Michigan he had aspirations to clean up the streets, rid the community of the plague of drug use and the plight the drug trade brought to the town. Collins had the most noble of intentions as a young officer. Andrew never thought he'd end up behind bars, nor did he intend to betray his oath and make an innocent man like, Jameel McGee suffer.

I think we need to hear their story as Steve Hartman tells it on the CBS evening news from a few years ago: [{click to watch video}](#).

The story of Jameel and Andrew is a powerful story of forgiveness, no doubt. But there is something more. The didn't just forgive and forget and move on. They became friends. They discovered brotherly love. They took their story of what God had done in their lives and needed to share it with others.

This is not unlike what happened between Peter and Jesus on the beach shortly after the glorious resurrection appearances of Easter morning. While it was pretty amazing the Jesus was raised from the dead, there was still some lingering issues that needed to be addressed. If you recall, Peter was like the #1 disciple and he made an oath to Jesus that he would serve and protect his Lord no matter what. The gospel of Matthew records the exchange in chapter 26: **“33 Peter said to him, “Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you.” 34 Jesus said to him, “Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.” 35 Peter said to him, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And so said all the disciples.”**

Peter didn't set out to betray his oath. Even though Jesus called it, Peter doubled down and as we may recall Peter messed up. Three times Peter betrayed the oath he made by denying that he even knew Jesus to save his own skin. This was the last exchange recorded between Peter and Jesus before Easter - a betrayal.

Not knowing what to do after Easter and not really feeling free to do anything, Peter decides to return to what he knows: fishing and some of the other disciples come with him.

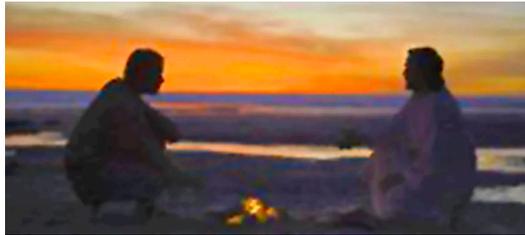
So the guys are out fishing. Can't catch a thing. Day-breaks and some smart Alec out for his morning cardio hollers out to the boat catch anything. And when the guys murmur back he suggests they fish the other side of the boat (like they hadn't tried that). But once the fish nets are magically full, they realize that ain't no jogger on the beach; it's Jesus!

Peter covers himself up (kinda like an acknowledgment of his sin) and swims to shore while the other guys haul the fish in.



When Peter gets there he see Jesus is already having breakfast. Jesus didn't need the guys to supply breakfast, he already had what was needed but gaudy received their catch anyway and they had a nice meal together... but I suspect there was still some tension in the air.

Jesus decides it's time to bury the hatchet, clear the air, there is too much to do to keep having to tiptoe around the elephant in the room (the betrayal). Just like Peter had denied Jesus



three times, Jesus asks Peter the same question three times. We heard Chris read it a little bit ago: "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,

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With that the air was cleared, not unlike Andrew and Jameel. But what we see here isn't just a pat forgiveness. This isn't a "I'm sorry. You're forgiven, exchange" which is powerful enough. After all Jesus was innocent and arrested and killed. This kind of forgiveness leads to action right?

Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep. Are the commands that come with each statement of forgiveness and reconciliation. Here, Jesus trusts Peter to do the thing he failed at doing: Being a witness to him. It's like Jesus knew Peter learned his lesson and he was changed. With each question and answer, Peter doesn't receive some pat response from Jesus, he gets a new command. A level up. And from there we learn that indeed Peter does love Jesus. Peter looked after Jesus' sheep. No one could ask for more and Jesus never asks for less.

I'm sure there are some of us here today who have failed Jesus. We may not have messed up in a way that landed an innocent person in jail, but perhaps we've failed to live into our oath to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. Or we have failed to love our neighbor as ourselves. Or maybe I'm the only one who can see myself in Peter the disciple or Andrew the former cop. But Jesus isn't content to leave us as people diminished by the worst things we've done.

Jesus comes to us. Jesus sets a meal before us. Offers it to us before we've even made things right. He asks us if we love him and if we say yes, our sin is no more and then we get marching orders to share that love with others.

That's what happens here at this table. We may not be beachside, but we are at the feast Jesus prepares for us. A feast for forgiveness and grace whose purpose is more than our restoration, it's our commissioning to tend Jesus' sheep.

Let's gather around this table and respond to Jesus inquiry: do you love me?