**May 5, 2019 John 21:1-19**

***A Question of Love***

**Scripture:** 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."

**Notes:**

1. Peter seems ***restless*** as he waits for Jesus.
   1. They fish through the night and catch ***nothing***.
   2. They ***cast*** their nets and the nets get heavy.
   3. Peter jumps ***overboard*** and ***swims*** to shore.
   4. The others bring the boat ashore with nets ***full*** of ***fish***.
   5. They sit and eat and enjoy each other’s ***fellowship***.
2. Jesus invites Peter for a ***private*** chat.
   1. Peter must feel like he has left ***Jesus*** down.
   2. Peter wants to be ***relieved*** of his burden of ***guilt***.
   3. Jesus is the ***same*** now as he was ***before***.
3. For each time Peter denied Christ, Jesus gave him the opportunity to be ***forgiven***.
   1. ***Mentor*** the new believers into the Way.
   2. ***Shepherd*** and pastor the church.
   3. “***Follow*** me.”
4. We too make mistakes and find it hard to ***forgive*** our self.
   1. Every time we fail the Lord, Jesus is there giving us an opportunity to be ***forgiven***.
   2. Each have a ***calling***, a ***purpose*** in God’s Kingdom.
   3. ***Jesus*** paid the price so that we may come to him.
   4. When we say it is too difficult to submit to the will of God, we are ***wrong***.
   5. It’s a question of ***love***.
   6. Allow Jesus to have ***control*** over your life.

**Transcript:**

Have you ever made a blunder so big that you felt your entire identity was destroyed? When I was 12 I enjoyed playing baseball. I felt that I was a pretty good ball player. My position of preference was catcher. I was involved in every play on defense, aside from the pitcher I felt most important on the field. We had a pretty good team that year. Ted pitched and played first base, I caught and moved around, and we were undefeated… that is until the night we played Schellsburg in Schellsburg.

We were up by a couple runs in the last inning and our pitcher was getting tired. So our coach decided to move Ted to catcher, me to left field and another guy in to pitch. I had a lot of confidence in our pitcher, and I was ready. So I go to left field and wouldn’t you know it, the sun was shining straight in my eyes. Just then the pitcher throws a fastball and the batter cracks the ball straight towards me. Again the sun is in my eyes and I can’t see the ball to save myself; it should have been an easy catch but I did not see it until it was dropping to my feet. The ball rolled all the way to the fence and every runner on base scored. We lost the game. Some may say I had a pride issue, but I was very confident in my ball playing ability, and I was very confident in our team; yet I failed and left my team down. It was our only loss that year, a game that we should have easily won.

Have you ever felt as if you had failed your friends, or family? Have you ever done something that made you second guess who you are? Something that made you feel like a failure, made you feel like an absolute loser. Have you ever experienced this with your spiritual walk, your walk with Jesus? And when you do something like this, when you feel this way, how do you go on, What do you do to make yourself feel better? Who do you turn to?

Today we are looking at just that situation and circumstance; Peter had failed Jesus. Jesus died, rose again and has gone away, and now Peter is looking for something to take his mind off of his mistakes. Turn with me to John 21:1-19 and share in our scripture reading today.

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As I said, Jesus has risen, but the disciples never knew when or where he would show up. Mary saw him in the garden on resurrection morning. Remember she thought he was the gardener, until he spoke her name. After she recognized Him, Jesus told her to go to tell the others that he was risen.

Then Jesus appeared to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Remember they were walking on the road headed to Emmaus. It was resurrection day, and they were talking about the things that had happened. When Jesus joined them, they didn’t recognize him. He told them of why the Messiah had to suffer and die. Then when they stopped for supper, He broke the bread and the eyes of the two disciples were opened and they recognized him.

That same evening, while the door to the room was locked, Jesus appeared again. He entered the room even though it was locked and he showed them his wounds. He ate some fish while he was there. But Thomas was not there, and when he was told, he said he would not believe. So a week later while they were again in the same locked room, Jesus comes again. This time he addressed Thomas’s doubts, telling him to touch the wounds and see that they are real.

And now, Jesus appears again. Peter is there with 6 of the other disciples, waiting. Peter seems to be restless as he sits waiting for Jesus to return. This happens when somebody is bothered by something. Perhaps Peter is bothered by his actions towards Jesus. Perhaps he is worried what Jesus will say to him when they are together again. Perhaps Peter is just having a pity party for himself. The great Peter, who would fight to the death by Jesus side…yet Jesus died and he never lifted a hand to stop the execution.

So He says, “I’m going fishing.” And the others decide to join him. They fish through the night and catch nothing. As the sun begins to rise they see a man on the shore. The man shouts out to them, “Children, you do not have any fish, have you?” And they respond, NO. So the man tells them to cast their net on the right side of the boat.

Lets push the pause button on our story here; lets stop and think a little, doesn’t this sound a bit familiar? Hasn’t this happened before? Peter and his friends fish all night long and catch nothing, then somebody tells them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat and they catch an amazing number of fish. Yes it did happen before in Luke 5, just before calling the disciples to be fishers of men, Jesus told them to cast their nets again for a catch. I wonder if this caught the attention of Peter. John doesn’t say anything about it, but we have to wonder.

So they cast their nets out and right away the nets get heavy. This does get the attention of the seven disciples. The nets are so heavy that they cannot pull the nets in. That is when John tells Peter that it is Jesus on the shore. Peter puts on some of his clothes and jumps overboard and swims to shore. Now in Luke 5 when this happens Peter kneels before Jesus and says, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” Nobody is here to record what happens.

What Peter does when he approaches Jesus, nor what is said between Jesus and Peter, but one has to wonder if Peter responds in the same way? What did they say to each other, and what was Peter thinking? “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” Forgive me lord for being such an arrogant self centered person. If only I could have an opportunity to take my words back. If only I could have another chance to stand by your side. If I could have another chance do the things you asked of me. But we do not know what peter was thinking. We do not know what was said between them as he reaches shore.

The other disciples are left to bring the boat ashore with the nets still in the water full of fish. But as they get to shore they see a fire with fish and bread on it. I wonder why Peter was so eager to get to shore and be with Jesus, and then in the story he turns and returns to the nets, pulling in the fish. But take note he takes the time to count how many fish are there. They make sure to mention there were 153 fish, big fish in the nets.

Jesus invites them to bring some fish and join him for breakfast. The passage notes that while the disciples are sure it was Jesus, yet in their minds they were questioning themselves. Is this real life or just a fantasy; they were wanting to ask him if he really was Jesus, but none of them had the nerve. As they sit and eat and enjoy each other’s fellowship, it is reminiscent of the Last Supper and the feeding of the five thousand. Jesus takes the bread from the fire, most likely he blessed it, and gives it to them, Jesus takes the fish, most likely he blessed it, and gives it to them. The memories had to be rushing through their minds.

It’s like Déjà vu all over again. When breakfast was over Jesus invites Peter for a private chat. I envision them walking down the shore as Jesus says to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" Now there is speculation as to what Jesus is referring to. Does Peter love Jesus more than his possessions; his fishing boat and nets? Or does Peter love Jesus more than he loves the other disciples? Or does Peter love Jesus more than the other disciples love Jesus? We may never know, but that isn’t the point, the point is does Peter love Jesus more than anything else in this whole wide world? And Peter’s response, "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.

There is a lot to take in with this story, but what does it all mean? What can we learn from this story? Why do the disciples go fishing even when they were told to go and wait on the Lord? Why do they not recognize Jesus standing on the beach as he talks with them? Are they oblivious to the events of their life that they seem to be reliving; the call to throw the nets over the other side of the boat after a night of empty nets. the miraculous catch, the breaking of the bread. What is the significance of 153 fish; first it is hard to count that many fish when there are distractions. The fish tend to not stay still, they flop around so there is a chance of mixing the counted with the uncounted. Why do they mention the fact that there were so many fish and the nets were not torn? Why if he already has fish and bread on the coals does he invite them to bring their fish? All of these thoughts bring valid questions but the questions I am drawn to today are the questions regarding the final conversation between Jesus and Peter. Peter was on shore before any of the other disciples, why didn’t Jesus ask him about his love before the others came on shore? Why did he ask him the same question three times?

Peter is still reeling after the events of Good Friday, and resurrection Sunday. Consider how you may have felt in his shoes. Peter swore to be by Jesus’ side to the death, Jesus is arrested, convicted, and crucified in less than 24 hours. And Peter did very little to prevent or stop it. Peter must feel like he has left Jesus, as well as the rest of the disciples, down. Peter was given the name Cephas, meaning Rock, but he has acted more like jello over the events of the previous days. There is unfinished business between Peter and Jesus and Peter wants to be relieved of his burden of guilt. He wants to repair the status of their relationship, and so does Jesus.

So Peter jumps in the water and makes it to shore before all the others. Why did he not say anything to Jesus then, and why did Jesus wait to talk to him. Its all about timing. Perhaps the time was not right, perhaps Peter needed time to process his need for repentance and forgiveness, maybe Jesus wanted John to be witness to their reconciliation. Maybe there needed to be time for fellowship before the business took place. Peter needed to see that Jesus was the same now as he was before. He is still the same Messiah now, after the resurrection as he was before

Jesus appeared at the locked room twice? But each time they were surrounded by all the other disciples. Hardly an appropriate time to discuss the failures of Peters actions or Peter’s lack of action. There needed to be a sense of privacy and intimacy to discuss these delicate matters. And while John followed along behind when they do have their conversation, the others were still far enough away to hear the conversation. John had been privy with many of Jesus’ most intimate conversations. Johns presence and witness to this reconciliation is needed. So Jesus asks Peter three times if Peter loves him. And all three times Peter affirms the question. For each time Peter denied Christ, Jesus gave him the opportunity to be forgiven.

But along with the forgiveness came responsibility. "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these? (15)". "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." “Feed my lambs.” Jesus knows Peter’s heart just as he knows our hearts today. In this first question Jesus is breaking the ice. And as Peter bears his soul with his answer Jesus confirms the calling He has upon Peter’s life. Feed my lambs; Jesus is asking Peter to care for the new believers. Jesus tells Peter, teach those who love me but do not know how to live for me. Mentor the new believers into the Way. Feed them the word of God so they may come to His grace and Sanctifying power. We have this same call in our lives…Mentor the new believers into the Way.

A second time, "Simon son of John, do you love me? (16)” "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." “Tend my sheep”. Jesus is installing Peter as the shepherd and pastor of the church. Peter is being commissioned to do the work that Jesus had been doing. While I may have the title of Pastor here in the church… You as well are called to minister and care for the lost and hurting. And then a third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?(17)” Peter doesn’t understand why he is being asked over and over again. This hurts Peters feelings, but Peter does not fully comprehend what Jesus is doing. It is only in hindsight that we are able to see what is going on here. "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." “Feed my sheep”

Jesus has now turned over the earthly duties of his ministry to Peter, and today the body of Christ still complete the earthly ministry. But who is the body of Christ, we are the body of Christ and we are called to complete the ministry here on earth, and concludes by instructing Peter to “follow me”, follow my example, follow my instruction

So many times we too are like Peter. We make mistakes in our spiritual walk and find it hard to forgive our self. Jesus knew Peter better than Peter knew himself, Jesus knew that when the action starts that Peter would preserve himself; Jesus not only knew Peter would deny him but also how many times it would happen. And Peter failed every time he was faced with an opportunity to defend Jesus. But Jesus knew Peter’s heart and gave him an opportunity to take care of the unfinished business in his life. To repent of his behavior and ask for forgiveness.

You may say that Jesus knew that Peter was going to lead the church. You are right. But what does He know about what you are going to do for His kingdom. We each face choices in our lives. Choices as to how we will follow the Lord, and choices as to how we will serve him. And for every time we fail the Lord. For every time we stumble and fall; For every time we come up short; Jesus is there giving us an opportunity to make amends, to be forgiven, and restored. Each of you have a calling in your life, a purpose in God’s Kingdom. Are you fulfilling your purpose in God’s Kingdom? And if not, Why? Is there unfinished business between you and the Lord? Are you distracting yourself with busy work trying not to deal with the shortcomings of your relationship with God? Are you avoiding the heart to heart talk with Jesus regarding your love for Him.

Jesus paid the price so that we may come to him with whatever we need. He came to earth and walked among men, he lived, taught, and healed on this earth without ever sinning; He endured every emotion and temptation we encounter and still remained sinless; and, he died on the cross as a sacrifice for our sin. He went to the grave and rose again conquering death.

SO when we say it is too difficult to submit to the will of God, we are wrong. What Christ did to secure our salvation was difficult; we only need to believe and be saved. We only need to turn away from the sin in our life. We only need to follow Jesus and do what he calls us to do. It’s a question of love. The unfinished business between us and the Lord only exists because we refuse to lay it down before the Lord.

Bring your burdens to Jesus and he will take them upon himself. Tear down the wall that you have built between you and Jesus. Allow Jesus to have control over your life and the situations you face. You are loved by our heavenly father. He makes you strong when you feel weak. He holds you in the palm of his hand and welcomes you into His family; you belong to Him.