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**“NEW LOVE (PART 1)”**

**John 21:1-19**

{Jn 21:15} **“Do you love me...?”** Jesus asks.

It is easy to answer glibly, almost automatically,

**“Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”**

{Jn 21:16} **“Do you love me?”** Jesus asks a 2<sup>nd</sup> time.

This time around failure and disobedience are remembered, and the answer is more subdued: **“Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”**

{Jn 21:17} **“Do you love me?”** Jesus asks again.

We *should* love him. We *want* to love him. We are humbled, yet hopeful: **“Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”**

? Decide to follow Jesus and He will ask, **“Do you love me?”** What will we say in reply? What will we do in response?

❑ Please turn with me to John 21:1-14 {p 1,107}.

For the disciples, these weeks since Easter have been ones of joy and ambiguity in nearly equal parts.

The reason for their joy is obvious. The Risen Lord has appeared twice to The Eleven, and several times to individuals and small groups.

But their reasons for ambiguity are just as real. They have spent days waiting awkwardly for who-knows-what to happen. They are afraid of persecution, uncertain what to do next, and tired of being cooped up.

Finally, Peter says {21:3} **“I’m going out to fish,”** and Thomas, Nathanael, James, John, and two others tag along. They spend all night on the Sea of Galilee and catch nothing.

Early in the morning Jesus appears on shore, but no one in the boat recognizes him. He calls out, {21:5} **“Friends, haven’t you any fish?”**

He suggests that they cast their net on the other side of the boat. They do, and within moments they catch so many fish (153 big ones) that they are **“unable to haul the net in.”**

**“It is the Lord!”** says John.

Peter immediately puts on his outer garment, jumps in the water, and swims to Jesus. It sounds strange, doesn’t it? But it is an act of devotion: first century Jews consider a greeting to be a religious act, and as such one must be clothed to do it.

The other six follow in the boat, towing the net. Christ Jesus serves them a breakfast of bread and fried fish on the beach.

This is the Lord’s third post-resurrection appearance to most of them. His victory has revived their faith and filled them with an eager hope. It’s an exciting morning!

❑ In verses 15-19, the celebratory mood turns serious. The Risen Lord asks Simon Peter, **“Do you love me more than these?”**

1) **“These”** might be the boat and the net. For Peter, his fishing gear represents stability, financial security, physical safety (no one is going to arrest him for catching fish), and confidence (he is a skilled and experienced fisherman).

⊕ If so this is a matter of sacrificial devotion: {Barclay} **“Are you [ready]... to abandon all hope of a successful career, to give up a steady job and... reasonable comfort, in order to give yourself forever to my people and to my work?”** Or,

2) **“These”** might be the other disciples.

⊕ If so, and if Jesus emphasizes the words *me* and *these* (**“Do you love me more than these?”**), it is a matter of priority: “Do you love me more than you love them?”

⊕ But if **“these”** are the other disciples and Jesus stresses the words *you* and *more* (**“Do you love me more than these?”**), it is a matter of relative commitment: **“Do you love me more than these”** others do?

☞ All three are credible but the last seems most likely, in light of Peter’s claims in Mt 26:31-35:

**Jesus told them, “This very night you will all fall away on account of me”....Peter replied, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.”**  
**“Truly, I tell you,” Jesus answered, “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” But Peter declared, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.”**  
**And all the other disciples said the same.**

⇒ If Jesus is asking, **“Do you love me more than these”** do, it is not a request for information; rather, it is a call to humility: Peter, do not presume that you alone will remain faithful and true.

Peter wisely forgoes any comparisons: **“Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”**

Jesus asks twice again, without the **“more than these”**: **“Do you love me?” “Do you love me?”**

Naturally, Peter feels hurt. Any of us would.

☼ Yet this line of questioning is an act of mercy. Keep in mind it was only a few weeks ago that Peter vehemently denied knowing him 3 times. Jesus has already forgiven him for that, but this morning, with these probing questions, He redeems Peter’s failure:

1) {Jn 18:17} **“I am not” “one of this man’s disciples.”**  
 // **“Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”** 2) {Mt 26:72}  
 Now with an oath **“I don’t know the man!”** // **“Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”** 3) {Mt 26:74} This time calling down curses: **“I don’t know the man!”** // **“Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”**

Jesus has loved Peter all along, but the burden of his forgiven-yet-still-unresolved failure has prevented him from freely receiving it. Now his denials are negated by his professions. Consequently, the doors of Peter’s soul are flung open to experience Christ’s love without reservation.

☼ Christ’s love is extravagant, poured out by the ocean-full on sinners who deserve one drop. It is gracious, depending entirely on his goodness and not one bit on ours. It is hopeful, for He sees past the crud to our potential holiness in redemption. It is transforming, for He accepts us at our most perverse yet calls us to our absolute best. It is eternal, for his love outlives time itself.

Christ invites all who have ever stumbled, slipped up, fallen, gotten lost, crashed and burned, missed the mark, failed miserably, misunderstood God, disbelieved God, run away from the Lord, ignored him, rejected him, denied him, or even betrayed him to receive his Father’s love. (Does that describe any of us here?)

◆ But the most blessed, most earthshaking, most revolutionary thing about God’s love in Christ is that **receiving it obligates and equips us to return to him and to share it with others.**

Each time Jesus asks the question, **“Do you love me?”** He follows up with an equally significant command: v 15 ~ **“Do you love me more than these?” “Feed my lambs.”** V 16 ~ **“Do you love me?” “Take care of my sheep.”** V 17 ~ **“Do you love me?” “Feed my sheep.”**

We will dig into the specific meaning of feeding and caring next week. For now, suffice it to say that if we love Jesus we must love others, especially our brothers and sisters in the household of God. As First

John 4:20-21 cautions: **“If we say we love God yet hate a brother or sister, we are liars. For if we do not love a fellow believer, whom we have seen, we cannot love God, whom we have not seen.”**

Here are three brief, yet essential observations about this new love:

✦ 1<sup>st</sup>, this love is risky.

In order to receive, return and share the love of God in Christ, Peter had to first be laid bare and cut open by those painful questions. We, too, must risk the anguish of deep examination, cleansing and reconciliation if we are to live in love.

☞ And in vv 18-19 Jesus foretells Peter’s violent death. In the end Peter was crucified upside down, to the glory of God. We probably won’t be martyred (though you never know), but discipleship is inherently risky. It is not the safe way to live.

✦ 2<sup>nd</sup>, this love is life-changing.

Peter has been a fisherman all his adult life. Now Jesus commissions him for a different work.

The Lord does not call most of us to literally change professions, but He does expect us to embrace a new purpose, new priorities, new passion, and a new way of living. Here in John 21 {N.T. Wright}:

**Fishing [is] what [Peter was] doing anyway whereas shepherding seems to stand for the new tasks within the new creation .... Those who find the risen Jesus going to the roots of their rebellion, denial, and sin and offering them love and forgiveness may also find themselves sent off to be shepherds.**

✦ 3<sup>rd</sup>, this love is a possible only in relation to God.

**Agape is a “theological” virtue. Theological virtues are “infused” by God... While we can practice love and thereby become more loving, we have the capacity for agape in the first place *only* because of God’s love for us. Human agape is a *responsive* love. Nor is it simply that God loves us first and we are therefore “commanded” to love our neighbor as ourselves. It is more than that: love is a theological virtue because we *cannot* do it without God’s help.** {J. Karen Lebacqz},

Receiving God’s love obligates and equips us to return to him and to share it with others. Far from being comfy cozy, all about me, and easy, it is risky, life-changing, and frankly, impossible apart from Jesus.

Yet there is nothing better. Nothing. Absolutely nothing!

**“Do you love me more than these?”**

**“Do you love me?”**

**“Do you love me?”** Christ Jesus asks.

What will we say in reply? What will we do in response?