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Beverly ECC, Chicago, IL

**“NEW LOVE” (Part 2)**  
**John 21:15-19**

{Jn 13:37} **“Lord... I will lay down my life for you”**

Peter confidently declared.

And eventually he did. Some 37 years later, in 67 A.D., Peter was crucified during the first empire-wide persecution. Tradition says he could have escaped, but chose to remain Rome out of devotion to the Lord.

Peter exalted God with his death, as Christ foretold {Jn 21:18-19}: **“Very truly I tell you... when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.’ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.”**

His courage in the face of crucifixion was the spectacular culmination of Peter’s discipleship. It is a sacrifice worth celebrating this Memorial Day Weekend.

Yet, I doubt he would have submitted to such a terrible execution had he not already {Mt 16:24, NLT} **“put aside... selfish ambition, [shouldered his] cross, and [followed]”** Jesus – not once, repeatedly, day after day.

Peter’s martyrdom was the dramatic climax of a series of smaller deeds of obedience, deeds that were not dramatic, deeds of *αγαπε* love that fulfilled the three-fold command to {Jn 21:15-17}: **“Feed my lambs.” “Take care of my sheep.” “Feed my sheep.”**

Bold love for God at all costs is the goal of discipleship. Obedient, costly love for Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the essence of following Jesus.

Count on it: I am not pursuing a martyr’s death! Yet if ever I am compelled to disown Christ or die, by the grace of God I hope to choose death. I want to be {Ac 5:41}

**“counted worthy of suffering”** on account of Jesus. I hope you choose the same.

Till then may we be known for deeds (great and small) of *αγαπε* love that fulfill the Lord’s command.

☐ Please turn with me to the crucial dialogue in John 21:15-19:

**“Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”** Christ Jesus asks. **“Yes, Lord,”** Peter answers, **“you know that I love you.”**

The Risen Lord asks a second time, **“Simon son of John, do you love me?”** **“Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”**

And then a third time, **“Simon son of John, do you love me?”** **“Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”**

✧ This line of questioning hurts Peter’s feelings. Yet it is an act of mercy.

Just a few weeks ago Peter vehemently denied knowing the Lord, not once but three times. Christ has already forgiven him, but with these 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.”**

The burden of Peter’s forgiven-yet-still-unresolved failure has prevented him from freely receiving God’s love. Now his denials are negated by his affirmations. Peter is free to experience Jesus’ love without reservation.

Through these probing, painful questions Peter begins {Eph 3:18} **“to grasp”** like never before **“how wide and long and high and deep is the love of**

**Christ**” –love that is shockingly extravagant (He dumps it by the ocean-full on people who deserve only a drop), scandalously gracious (depending entirely on *his* goodness and not one whit on *ours*), outrageously hopeful (He sees past our failures to our potential holiness), painfully noble (He seeks us at our most depraved, but demands our absolute best), and mind-bogglingly steadfast (it outlives time itself!).

◆ Yet the most blessed, most revolutionary aspect of God’s love in Christ is that receiving it obligates and equips us to return it to him and to share it with others.

♦ Look at vv 15-17. **Every time Jesus asks the question, “Do you love me?” He follows up with a 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.**”

Do you hear the implied “if-then”? *If* you love me, *then* feed my lambs; *if* you love me, *then* take care of my sheep; *if* you love me, *then* feed my sheep.

*If-then* indicates a direct and frequently causal relationship between 2 things: if it is sunny tomorrow, then we will walk with our school group in the Memorial Day Parade; if the Blackhawks lose two more games, then the series with Detroit will be over; if the price of gas hits \$4 this summer, then the kids will be pushing the car. *If* you love me as you say you do, *then* feed my lambs.

Some will say, ‘Jesus was talking to Peter about his particular duties. This says nothing about how receiving God’s love in Christ obligates and equips us to return it to him and to share it with others.’ But I am confident it does.

Please turn to John 10:1-16 {p 1,093}. This is the Parable of the Good Shepherd (Jesus, who is also the gate for the sheep) and his flock (everyone who answers his call to follow him). Several themes jump out:

One is the Good Shepherd’s close bond with his sheep: v 3 ~ “**He calls his own sheep by name**”; v 4 ~ “**his sheep follow him because they know his voice**”; v 14 ~ “**I know my sheep and my sheep know me**”

Another is His provision of life to his sheep: v 9 ~ “**whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture**”; and v 10 ~ “**I have come that they may have life...to the full.**”

A third is the Good Shepherd’s sacrifice for his sheep: v 11 ~ “**The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep**”; v 15 ~ “**I lay down my life for the sheep**”; and v 17 ~ “**I lay down my life.**”

Close bond with the sheep, provision of life to the sheep, and self-sacrifice for the sheep: what are these, if not the practical expression of Christ’s *αγαπε* love?

Let’s flip back to Jn 21:15-17. The Risen Lord charges Peter to be like the Good Shepherd. I propose that while leaders do have unique responsibilities, the under-lying directive is binding on every disciple: If we love Jesus we must love (*αγαπατε*) and help Him to shepherd others.

Elsewhere, Jesus says: {Jn 13:34-35} “**A new command I give you: love [*αγαπατε*] one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.**”

Unlike other kinds of love, *αγαπε*:

† Is God-centered: {Lebacqz} “**We have the capacity for *αγαπε* ... only because of God’s love for us. Human *αγαπε* is a responsive love.... we cannot do it without God’s help.**” {1 Jn 4:19} “**We love because he first loved us.**”

† Depends entirely on the giver: we share it with worthy and unworthy alike – not because of who they are, but because of who we are in Christ – and this equips us to carry out even his most difficult command to **“love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”** (Matthew 5:44);

† Is a (more or less) permanent disposition: it is a matter of intent, so we share it regardless of our feelings (of course, in our sin we sometimes fail; even so, *αγαπε* is our determined and consistent choice);

† Is indifferent to worldly value: we share it in equal measure with the beautiful *and* the ugly, the brilliant *and* the dim-witted, the industrious *and* the lazy, the rich *and* the poor, the blue bloods *and* the blue collars;

† Is humble: we share it in thanksgiving, grateful both for the other person and the opportunity to channel the love of God in Christ to them;

† Is practical: we share it in word and deed, doing our part to meet each other’s material, social, emotional, and spiritual needs even as we maintain appropriate boundaries;

† Is transformative: as we share it, it brings out the best in us and, often, the recipient, as well; it makes us more patient, kind, forgiving, truthful, pure, trusting, hopeful, and steadfast; and, *αγαπε* love

† Is sacrificial: we share it when it is convenient and inconvenient, easy and hard, refreshing and taxing, socially acceptable and unpopular, safe and dangerous; not that we want to suffer, but obedience to the Risen Lord is worth the hardship.

◆ Receiving God’s love in Christ obligates and equips us to return it to him and to share it with others.

In the end, Peter died for the Lord. But his martyrdom was the dramatic climax of a series of smaller deeds of obedience, deeds that were not dramatic, deeds

of *αγαπε* love that fulfilled the three-fold command to {Jn 21:15-17}: **“Feed my lambs.” “Take care of my sheep.” “Feed my sheep.”**

Let us follow Peter’s example.

May we be known for deeds of *αγαπε* love that fulfill the Lord’s command.