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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“PETER, RAISED WITH CHRIST”**  
**John 21:15-19**

‡ Why me?

We usually ask this amid adversity and tragedy, as a valid lament or a frivolous gripe. It comes naturally, doesn't it? Especially when the difficulty is unexpected or unearned.

‡ Why me?

How about when things go surprisingly well? What about those unmerited gifts, the good things we enjoy though we have not warranted them?

Do we ask *Why me* then? That is not so instinctive, is it?

I have had my share of hardships. Some of them I did not deserve. Yet many more good things have happened to me, and I cannot take credit for most of them.

‡ Why me?

Why was I born a white male in U.S. in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century? Why was I entrusted to good parents who loved God and raised me in the Church? Why was I blessed with the ideal marriage and such a beautiful family?

Why is God so merciful to me? Why is God so generous to me? Why me?

I suspect the Apostle Peter learned how to ask *Why me* in this way, if not before Resurrection Day than after it.

□ {Col 3:1} Please turn to John 21:15-19. This chapter records what is (probably) Christ's penultimate appearance, his second to the last manifestation.

Seven of the apostles are on the shore by the Sea of Galilee. The Risen Lord has just served them breakfast. Now he engages Peter in a dialog that is painful, yet powerfully restorative and elevating.

This interaction reveals three answers to the question *Why me*? These apply to us as well as to Peter, so I urge you to listen carefully.

① We are tracing three intertwining themes in this conversation. The first is in verses 15-17.

■ In verse 15 the Savior asks **“Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”**

{Mt 26:33} **“These”** could be the other disciples. A few hours before the Lord's arrest Peter boasted, **“Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.”** If Jesus is gesturing toward them he is asking, **“Do you love me more than these”** others do?

Or **“these”** could be Peter's fishing boat and nets, the paraphernalia of his life apart from the Lord. If so, Jesus is asking him to consider whether he is a true Christ Follower or just a fair-weather friend.

● {Jn 18:17} Either way this question echoes another, posed to Peter a few weeks ago by a servant girl: **“You aren't one of his disciples ... are you?”**

That night Peter said, No! **“I am not” “one of his disciples.”**

But this morning he answers, **“Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”**

■ In verse 16 the Savior asks again, **“Simon son of John, do you love me?”**

● {Jn 18:25} This echoes the question asked by a second stranger that fateful night: **“You aren’t one of his disciples too, are you?”**

**“Peter denied it.”** No, **“I am not” “one of his disciples”!**

But this morning he answers, **“Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”**

■ In verse 17 the Savior asks a third time: **“Simon son of John, do you love me?”**

● {Jn 18:26-27} This echoes the question from a third stranger that horrible night: **“Didn’t I see you with him in the garden?”** Peter denied it a third time, **“and at that moment a rooster began to crow.”**

But this morning he answers, **“Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”**

The risen Christ asks, **“Do you love me?”** once, twice, a third time.

Jesus is not rubbing Peter’s nose in his failure. Nor is he trying to figure out what he does not know.

★ Christ asks this of Peter so Peter can know he loves Jesus. He is raising Peter from the depths to which he has sunk.

Messiah loves us too well to allow guilt, shame, and regret to fester within us. He wields his Spirit, his Word, and our conscience like scalpels, cutting into our self-inflicted wounds to drain the poison and open us to his goodness.

It is a painful process! But if we trust him and are teachable, confessing our sin and accepting his conviction, we will be reconciled to God once more. Abundant life will fill us again. We will be revived.

? Why does the Lord raise Peter? Why me? Why you?

✎ Messiah raises us for our good, in order to restore us.

② The second theme is also in verses 15-17.

■ After the first question and answer in verse 15 Jesus instructs, **“Feed my lambs.”** After the second in verse 16 he directs, **“Take care of my sheep.”** After the third in verse 17 Jesus commands, **“Feed my sheep”** ({Jn 10:4} Elsewhere, we learn that his **“sheep”** are those who **“follow him.”**)

Peter denied knowing Christ not once, not twice, but three times. He was felled by his own self-reliance, impulsivity, short-sighted, fear, and pride. Surely, he has forever disqualified himself from meaningful service. How can he be of any use to the Lord? And yet the Savior says to this flawed failure **“Feed my lambs,” “Take care of my sheep,” “Feed my sheep.”**

★ Christ commands this to give Peter purpose and value in the kingdom of God. He is raising Peter up.

{1 Pet 2:9} This is not meaningful only for pastors and deacons. Peter is speaking to the whole Church when he writes later: **“you are... a royal priesthood.”**

Everyone who says ‘Yes’ to Christ’s invitation is responsible to care for others in the flock. Loving Jesus means serving others in a spirit of *αγαπη* [agapē] love.

Allow me to make a few remarks about this kind of service.

◆ {1 Jn 4:19} Our service is God-empowered. **“We love because he first loved us.”**

◆ Our service is deliberate. It is a matter of the godly will, not emotion. We serve even if we don’t feel like it.

◆ Our service is holistic. We serve the whole person, doing our part to address material, social, and emotional needs along with the spiritual.

◆ Our service is sacrificial. We don’t do it for applause or for tax deductions. We serve even when it is difficult or unpopular.

◆ Our service is humble. We are servants, not saviors. We do not reach down from above, we walk alongside. We do not compel, we invite.

★ God-empowered, deliberate, holistic, sacrificial, and humble: who does that sound like? Christ Jesus! Not only does our service give us purpose and value in the Kingdom of God, it yokes us to the Son himself.

❓ Why does the Lord raise Peter? Why me? Why you?

✎ Messiah raises us to unite us with him as we serve others.

③ The third theme is in verses 18-19.

■ In verse 18 Jesus prophesies to the apostle Peter, **“when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but 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.”**

■ According to verse 19 this “[indicates] **the kind of death by which Peter [will] glorify God.”**

On the night Messiah was arrested, Simon Peter could have magnified the Lord. He did not.

But in roughly thirty years, in 64 A.D., he will be led to a place of execution, his hands will be stretched out, and he will be crucified for insisting Jesus is Lord and Caesar is not. He will be given the chance to save his own skin by denying his faith, but he won’t take it. He will glorify God even in his death.

The focus here is not on martyrdom, it is on elevating God is. To repeat verse 19, this is **“the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.”**

{1 Co 6:20} We, too, are called to exalt God by every possible means. As Scripture states **“You were bought with a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”**

This is a sacred calling. We fulfill it in holy speech, conduct, and relationships. In Romans 12:1 Paul urges, **“in view of God’s mercy ... offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.”** God is honored as we devote our time, opportunities, talents, skills, labor, money, possessions, thoughts, words, and deeds to him.

Such all-encompassing worship will bring us into conflict with the world. In some cultures, it brings

persecution down on the heads of Christ Followers. Even then we are to honor God. First Peter 4:16, **“If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise”** [lit., **“glorify”**] **God that you bear his name.”**

{Jn 15:8} Whether we pass away violently in a death camp or quietly in our beds, it is to the **“Father’s glory that [we] bear much fruit, showing [ourselves] to be [Christ’s] disciples”** even in our dying.

? Why does the Lord raise Peter? Why me? Why you?

✎ Messiah raises us so we can glorify God.

? Why me?

Asking this comes naturally amid adversity and tragedy. I encourage us to practice asking it when things go surprisingly well, and when we are blessed with unmerited gifts.

? Why me? This is part of the answer:

Messiah raises us – even us! – in order to restore us. He raises us to unite us with him as we serve others. And he raises us so we can glorify God.

John 21:15-19 is the word of the Lord.