

Sermon ✝ May 1, 2022  
John 21:1-19  
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The disciples had been fishing all night . . . and they hadn't caught a thing. As dawn breaks Jesus appears on the shore and tells them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat, it's amazing they hadn't already tried this. And strangely they do not recognize him . . . but they do what he says . . . and almost immediately their nets fill with fish.

John exclaims, "*It is the Lord!*" and Peter, unable to restrain himself jumps into the water, and swims ashore.

When they all get to shore, Jesus has a fire going and makes breakfast for them. The really important thing happens after breakfast. Jesus turns to Peter, and says, "*Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?*" Though he was addressing the big fisherman, the words can also be directed toward us. What does it mean to love God? That is the question we consider this day.

The focus of love is Jesus. He is set before us as the object of our love. Not a creed, not a code of ethics, not a religious fellowship . . . he simply asks; "*Do you love me?*"

No one can see God except through Christ. He is the Word in human personality. In the fullness of time, he assumed the form of our existence, bearing in his body our sorrows and griefs. Constrained by love, he accepted the cross. Put to death in the flesh, he was raised by the spirit . . . and ever lives to make intercession for his people.

Jesus is his name and he asks, "*Simon, son of John, do you love me?*" There was good reason to ask for not long before Peter had denied him three times. Each time Jesus asked Peter the question, the memory of that tragic failure was surely awakened. But Peter had repented . . . he had wept bitterly.

Jesus' question was not aimed at how much Peter regretted the past or how many tears had been shed but, "*Do you love me?*" It is his preeminence in our heart that makes the other actions acceptable. Specifically Jesus asks, "*Do you love me more than these?*" That is, "*More than these other disciples love me.*"

Remember Peter is the one who had boasted that he would never let Jesus down. The question is addressed three times to Peter. The first two times the Greek word he uses for love denotes formal devotion. But on the third inquiry he is more personal, "*Are you my friend?*"

Our Lord wishes us to have such a relationship with him. As sincere as any affirmation may be, it needs to be declared in more than words.

Each time Peter confesses his love, Jesus responds, *"Feed my sheep."* Love for Christ overflows in ministry. It cannot be self-contained.

Just as he was sent by love into the world, so he sends his disciples to show his love to those for whom he gave his life. In this ministry, there is a place for us all.

Our form of service will vary depending upon the calling and the gifts of God. But we are all ministers.

Ministry belongs to the whole body of Christ, and in some way, every believer is called to care for the weaker sheep.

Would it not be appropriate to ask ourselves what is the ministry through which our gifts are being employed to the glory of God. What are you doing with your talents.

For most people, it's not that you don't have a specific talent, it's that you aren't using it. Finally, when talking of love, we must emphasize that at the heart of love is obedience to the will of God.

This is emphasized in the final word of Jesus to Peter, "Follow me." That's the bottom line. That's what it's all about. Jesus is saying, *"Whoever has my commandments and keeps them . . . it is that person who loves me."*

This kind of love is not easy. It means the surrendering of our rights. It is to be submissive to a higher calling...and that is not always easy. It all comes down to personal commitment. Finally we will not have to answer for anyone except ourselves. The choice is our own.

A young boy was told by his doctor that he could save his sister's life by giving her some of his blood. The six-year old girl was near death . . . a victim of a disease from which the boy had made a marvelous recovery two years earlier. Her only chance was a blood transfusion. As the boy had the same blood type, he was the ideal donor.

*"Johnny, are you ready to give your blood for Mary?"* the doctor asked.

The boy hesitated, his lower lip started to tremble, then he smiled, and said, "Sure, doc, I'll give my blood for my sister."

The children were wheeled into the operating room . . . Mary, thin and pale . . . Johnny robust and the picture of health. Neither spoke, but when their eyes met, Johnny grinned. As his blood siphoned into Mary's veins, one could almost see new life come into her tired body.

The procedure was almost over when johnny's brave little voice broke the silence. *"Say, doc, when do I die?"*

It was only then that the doctor realized what the moment of hesitation and trembling lip really meant. Johnny thought that in giving his blood to his sister . . . he was giving up his life.

In that brief moment, he had made his great decision. In a way, that is the kind of decision we make in following Christ. Of course, the analogy breaks down when we consider what did happen to Jesus when he gave his blood for us. At least it points out the nature of our sacrifice.

As we know our heart, we choose to give all that we are to all that we know of him.

Simon . . . Beth . . . Alex . . . Donna . . . do you love me?

Then feed my sheep. And whatever it takes, follow me! Amen.