The Palm/Passion Sunday

**Sermon Series: Peter, A Portrait of a Christian (6)**

**“Do You Love Me?”**

John 21:1-17 / March 28, 2021

Sometimes, some movies show a back story while the credits roll up on the screen with music after the movie. This scene soothes the regret that the movie is over and at the same time ends the story that could not be finished. Through these scenes, people get to know what they were curious about and understand the movie's themes and messages better. John 21 shows the back story that has not yet been completed after the story of the gospel is over.

With the testimony of the resurrected Jesus, the Gospel of John ends in chapter 20. But the bible readers are still curious about Peter. What happened to him after he denied Jesus three times in the courtyard of the high priest? Where was he when Jesus was crucified? When he heard through Mary Magdalene that Jesus' tomb was empty, he ran and checked the empty tomb. Where did he go next? We don't know where he was until the gospel is over. But after all the gospel stories were finished in John 20, Peter’s final story was added as an appendix.

Fortunately, we can hear Peter's final story through John chapter 21. Here we know how he met the resurrected Jesus and how he was forgiven by him. The story is not only touching and so beautiful, but it also serves to convey the message of the entire Gospel once again clearly. It is also my personal favorite story of the gospel. Let's start the last sermon of the series with the theme of ‘Peter, A Portrait of a Christian.’

**Back to the Starting Place**

To understand how meaningful today's story is, it is necessary to return to the story of how Peter and Jesus first met. It was early in the morning. Simon and some fishermen were washing their nets by the lake. They had worked hard all night and caught nothing. Then Jesus approached Simon and told him to put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch. When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. Then Jesus said to Simon, “Don't be afraid. From now on, you will be fishing for people.”

Three years have passed since then. When Jesus, who Peter had abandoned everything for and followed, was executed on the cross, Peter was discouraged and decided to return to his hometown and live again catching fish. That day, he worked hard all night but caught nothing. The dawn was breaking. Then the resurrected Jesus was by the lake and told Peter to let down the net to the right side of the boat. When he did, he was unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. Isn't this a ‘déjà vu’ where what happened in the past repeats itself?

Yes, what happened when Peter first met Jesus was repeated in the same place three years later. And this meeting would be the last meeting between Peter and Jesus. Jesus took Peter to the first moment at the last moment. What does this mean? Peter lived simply catching fish in a shallow place, but through his first meeting with Jesus, his life changed dramatically to a life of catching people from in the depths.

Three years of life with Jesus was a series of excitement and impression for Peter. But Peter, who was greatly disappointed by Jesus’ death, was about to return to his hometown before he had met Jesus. The resurrected Jesus came back to Peter, who was discouraged, and called him back to the place of his first love. Peter returned to his hometown, but Jesus brought him back to his starting place with Jesus. When we are discouraged, the resurrected Lord always comes to us and bring us back to the starting place with him. It is an amazing grace of the resurrection.

**Breakfast by the Lake**

When Peter saw Jesus by the lake and ran into him, Jesus was burning charcoal and baking fish and some bread. After telling Peter to bring more fish he had just caught, Jesus invited other disciples to come and have breakfast. They all knew that he was Jesus, but no one asked. He must had died on the cross. But he was now speaking in front of them alive. They probably couldn’t open their mouths because they were not sure whether it was a dream or a reality.

Jesus took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. Jesus ate together with them. Eating together means more than that hungry people filling empty stomachs with food together. When we eat together, we share the elements of life and become a body that shared the same food. Therefore, eating together means that no matter who we are and what we do, we grant and accept each other without any condition to the one table. Therefore, eating together is a sacrament of unconditional forgiveness, love, and grace. This is the meaning of the Holy Communion. But even eating together simply could also have a precious meaning.

There is a scene where we should pay attention. It is a scene where Jesus was cooking over a charcoal fire. In the Gospels, the word ‘charcoal’ comes out only twice. One occurs in today’s text (John 21:9) and the other appears in John 18 where Peter was warming himself at a charcoal fire outside the high priest’s house, while he denied Jesus. Now, at another charcoal fire, Jesus was making food for Peter who had betrayed him. If the previous one was a ‘charcoal fire of betrayal,’ it was a ‘charcoal fire of love’ that forgives his betrayal. This was a sacrament to wash away Peter’s sin.

After the meal, Jesus asked Peter three times over and over, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Why did Jesus ask him three times? As you know, Peter had denied knowing Jesus three times before the rooster crowed in the courtyard of the high priest. Jesus wanted Peter to forgive him as much as he did wrong. If Peter had denied the Lord ten times, perhaps Jesus would have asked ten times. This was an act of deep consideration and love to cleanse Peter’s sin clearly, thoroughly and completely.

**Feed My Sheep**

When Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love me?” Peter answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Then every time Jesus told him, “Take care of my sheep” or “Feed my sheep.” What does ‘loving the Lord’ have to do with ‘feeding the Lord’s sheep?’ Jesus’ love for us was demonstrated by his death on the cross. How can we demonstrate our love for the Lord? It is demonstrated by the practice of loving, caring, and feeding others.

In John 15, Jesus said, “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:12-13) In 1 John 4:20, John the apostle gave a similar word, “For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.”

The way to express our love for Jesus is only possible by loving and caring for others. As Jesus taught in the metaphor of sheep and goats, this literally appears as a practice of feeding and caring for others. “For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick, and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” (Matthew 25:35-36)

Feeding sheep does not necessarily mean pastoral activities of pastors. Everyone is the sheep of the Lord. The obligation to love and care for them is not just for apostles, pastors, or special spiritual leaders. If we truly love the Lord, we cannot help but take care of and love those whom the Lord has loved until he gives his body to the cross. Our attitude toward others is evidence of our love and commitment to Jesus. This is what it means to say, “If you love me, feed my sheep.”

Jesus did not forgive Peter perfunctorily, but he forgave Peter in detail as if he had washed away each of his sins. He asked Peter if he truly loved him three times to forgive his three betrayals. He burned the charcoal fire to remove his betrayal before the charcoal fire. What can we explain about this love? Jesus said that if you truly love me, just as I have forgiven you, just as I have loved you, you should also forgive my sheep and dedicate your life to loving my people.

**Do You Love Me?**

On March 16, there was a terrible shooting in Atlanta, Georgia. A man named Robert Aaron Long allegedly drove to massage parlors and killed eight people. Police are still investigating, and said, “nothing is off the table” to discern if this was “racially motivated.” But the killing had a profound impact on the Asian American community, and many immigrants became so resentful as they considered this tragedy.

I want to ask this person how God and guns are connected, and how loving God and loving guns are connected. Of course, we could like guns. It may be necessary for us. But how can he say that he loves God when he kills eight people with that gun? What kind of love does he have for God? How could that person who loves God intentionally commit murder and say that he loves God without shame?

We need to check out our words and thoughts of loving God. How do we love the invisible God? John the Apostle explains that to love God who is invisible, one must love the brothers and sisters who are visible first. Jesus also told Peter to feed his sheep if he loved Jesus. Everyone, if we love God, let's not just say it in words, but do it in the practice of love. If we confess that we love God by prayer or praise, let’s demonstrate it by loving our brothers and sisters, who are the Lord’s sheep.

There was a man who lost a young son in a tragic accident at the church I served in the past. He went to church, but he was not a religious person. He couldn't sleep at night because of anger, resentment, and self-hatred. He drank and cried every night. But the congregation brought flowers, cards, and food and put them in front of the house every day. Some people hugged him for a long time, and others cried together with him. He later confessed. “When I was in the deepest darkness, I saw God come to me with flowers, cards, and food in front of my house. God hugged me for a long time and cried with me when I struggled with pain...”

If you love the Lord, you must be God's hands, feet, and chest, and be the one who feeds, cares and loves the people we meet in the world. Everyone, do you love the Lord? Then feed the sheep of the Lord! <Amen>