

Weekend of Sunday, May 5, 2019
3rd Sunday of Easter/Lectionary X/Proper X/Year C
Primary Text: John 21:1-19
Sermon Title: “Do You Love Jesus More Than Anything?”

Theme

The risen Christ appears again to his disciples by the sea where they were first called. After echoes of the fishing and feeding miracles, he gives a final reminder of the cost of a disciple’s love and obedience.

Text

¹After [he appeared to his followers in Jerusalem,] Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. ²Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. ³Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will go with you.” They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵Jesus said to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” They answered him, “No.” ⁶He said to them, “Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. ⁷That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. ⁸But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

⁹When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. ¹⁰Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” ¹¹So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹²Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, “Who are you?” because they knew it was the Lord. ¹³Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.

¹⁴This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

¹⁵When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” ¹⁶A second time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” ¹⁷He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. ¹⁸Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.” ¹⁹(He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, “Follow me.”

Sermon

You know for me, the liturgical Season of Easter and the earthly Season of Spring and a week off have certainly lightened my spirit, and I think it shows in the way this sermon came together. During Lent I probably would have handled the details of the readings more *reverently*. But now I feel I can explore them more *casually*.

For example, I want to know when this Gospel Reading took place. John told us in verse 14 that this was the third appearance of the risen Lord Jesus. The first was on the evening of Resurrection Sunday when the disciple Thomas *was not* present and Jesus gave them the gift of the Holy Spirit. And the second was a week later (20:26) when Thomas *was* present, where Jesus said to Thomas, ²⁹"Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

I don't know where Pr. Collins went with his sermon last week, but I take comfort in that verse, because we are the ones who have not seen and yet believe. Jesus blesses us!

According to John's Gospel account, all we know about the timing of this appearance is that it was more than a week after the Resurrection, and that the disciples have already received the Holy Spirit, though I think it could be argued, they didn't yet know what to do with it. And I say that because, as the story goes, the disciples seem to lack focus; lack mission. And so, they went fishing.

I am going to speculate that this was not sport fishing for fun. They needed to make a living for themselves and fishing is what at least some of them did for a living prior to becoming Jesus' disciples, and so that is what they reverted back to.

John does not record this but Luke's Gospel account of the call of Simon Peter happened in a similar fashion. According to Luke (5:1-11), one morning Jesus found Peter exhausted from a night of fishing during which he caught nothing and told him to put out again and cast his nets. The catch that day was so big it took others to help bring it in. When Peter recognized that Jesus had caused this event, he fell down before him. And it was at that point that Jesus said, ¹⁰"Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people."

Back to today's Gospel Reading from John, once again it was in the miracle of another great catch that it was revealed to Peter that he was in the presence of Jesus, the Christ. This time however, he was not in fear of being in the presence of the Holy, he runs, or rather, swims toward it.

The tradition of the church indicates that his Ascension was on the fortieth day after the Resurrection, but who really knows how long Jesus was around before his Ascension. But during that important time, we are lead to believe that Jesus appeared to his disciples, both the remaining original disciples and to many of the others that were his devoted followers.

Probably the most important feature of this passage for today is Jesus' three-fold questioning of Peter. You probably know from other teaching and learning opportunities that Jesus asked Peter if he loved him three times in slightly varying ways. And Peter replied in the affirmative in three slightly varying and increasingly frustrated ways. And three times, upon hearing Peter's affirmative answers, Jesus gave Peter three similar commands.

This was Jesus' way of giving Peter three opportunities to affirm his love and obedience corresponding to the three ways that Peter had previously denied even knowing Jesus during the Passion.

Jesus asked variations of the question three times because, though he knew he could count on Peter, Peter had demonstrated a lack of self-confidence, a lack of clarity about what discipleship in Jesus meant. And so the three-fold dialogue helped Peter understand the weight of a life of apostleship – that is, one who is about to be sent out with the message of the Gospel.

But what I want to explore in the time I have left is the question that is the title of this sermon, "Do You Love Jesus More Than Anything?"

Fact is, Jesus never asked that question. His closest question he asked Peter was, ¹⁵"do you love me more than these?" presumably referring to the other disciples. In the Monthly Edition of Eye On Zion the actual title I chose was, "Do You Love Jesus More Than Any?" But then Kaari accidentally added "thing" making it "anything" and I thought that was a better question anyway, so there it is.

"Do You Love Jesus More Than Anything?" It is arguably the most important question you will ever be asked. And the words you say mean little compared to the life you live. "Do You Love Jesus More Than Anything?"

Personally, my life has changed a lot since I came to Zion.

I live in a condo now, and I have had to learn to not be concerned about things that are out of my control regarding property.

My oldest son Drake got married to Korie. They and Aaron, my younger son, moved away, and then moved back. And then Drake and Korie had a child, my grandson Elliott. My family means more to me now than ever before and I cherish my time with them.

"Do I love Jesus more than anything?" Even more than my personal possessions; my home, or my family? I'm going to have to say "yes," but I hope I never get challenged on it.

I have a lot of other interests in my life. "Do I love Jesus more than anything?" Again, I want to say "yes," but I also don't really want to give those things up that make my life richer and fuller with them in it.

The twenty-first chapter of John ends awkwardly, not at all like we might think it should.

After Jesus tested the conviction of Peter and told him to follow him, we don't really know what happened, at least as far as John's Gospel. Presumably they walk off and what? We know that Jesus ascended but John doesn't mention it. We know that Peter lived a long and faithful life, but John doesn't mention it. We are left to wonder how the story turned out.

That got me wondering how your story turns out. In fact it got me wondering how my story turns out.

I'm not young anymore. I have to think about what's next for me presuming I live long enough to retire. What will I do? Will I go fishing? I used to enjoy that. Will I move to a warmer climate? Or will I stay involved in the church like many of my retired colleagues have done? I don't know. We will have to wait and see.

And as your spiritual leader, I wonder how your story turns out. Being Christian is obviously not as trendy as other parts of modern life. Ask around where you spend your time; at work or at school. Not many talk about being Christian, or being a member of a church. Do you talk about your faith, about spiritual matters, about what ultimately matters in your life?

And so back to the question that is the sermon title, "Do you love Jesus more than anything?" It's easy to say "yes." Peter answered yes three times, and even got a little frustrated that Jesus kept asking him. But that is because Jesus knew then and it still applies today, that a life of discipleship in him is much more difficult to live out than to simply say "yes" to.

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

My Raisin' the Bar Challenge for you today and this week is to ponder this question in all moments of your life; ask yourself "Do I love Jesus more than anything?"

- More than my possessions?
- More than my career?
- More than my family?

Because Jesus *is* calling you to follow him. Do you love him more than anything?

Prayer

Lord God you have blessed us so with such abundant life that the challenge to follow you in whatever way we discern that, seems like a hardship to us. We pray that you would so move us by your Spirit that we will be willing to follow your Son and our Lord to whatever he calls us to do. We pray this in his name. Amen