

*When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?”*

*“Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.”*

*Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”*

*<sup>16</sup> Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me?”*

*He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”*

*Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”*

*<sup>17</sup> The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”*

*Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”*

*Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. <sup>18</sup> I tell you the truth, 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.” <sup>19</sup> Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!”*

*<sup>20</sup> Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord, who is going to betray you?”) <sup>21</sup> When Peter saw him, he asked, “Lord, what about him?”*

*<sup>22</sup> Jesus answered, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.” <sup>23</sup> Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?”*

*<sup>24</sup> This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. (John 21:15-24)*

### **Peter: Love Me More than These**

Today is our last conversation with Christ – that is, it’s the end of our summer series in which we’ve listened in while Jesus spoke with a number of different people. Today, Jesus is talking with Simon Peter. Jesus begins today’s conversation by asking Peter three times if Peter loves him. But if you look carefully, the first time Jesus asks, the question is a little different. Jesus said, **“Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?”** What does he mean by “more than these”? Well, there are four grammatical possibilities. Jesus could’ve been talking about all the stuff on the beach – fishing nets and tackle. So he could’ve been asking, “Do you love me more than fishing?” That’s not a very likely possibility. He could’ve been talking about the other disciples. He could’ve been asking, “Simon, do you love me more than you love your fellow disciples?” Or, “Simon, do you love me than these other disciples love me?” Finally, it’s technically possible that Jesus was talking about the fish. “Simon, do you love me more than these fish love me?” That’s kind of my favorite. So, I really wanted to make my theme this morning, “Don’t be a cold fish! Love Jesus more!” But as much fun as that would’ve been, it’s certainly not what Jesus meant. When you look at all that had happened, you really have to conclude that Jesus was asking Peter, “Do you love me more than these other disciples do?” He goes on to teach him what real love for our Savior means. So, my friends, let’s take Jesus’ words to heart this morning:

**Love me more than these.**

**I. Love me by ministering to my people.**

**II. And love me by giving your life to me.**

**I.**

This conversation with Christ probably took place a couple of weeks after Jesus’ resurrection. The disciples were fishing on the Sea of Galilee and they had caught nothing. But as the sun came up, Jesus called to them from the shore and told them to cast their net on the other side of the boat and they brought in a huge load of fish. John told Peter, **“It is the Lord!”** Peter jumped in the water and swam to shore, where he found Jesus making breakfast. When Jesus told them to bring some of their fish, Peter dragged the net up on to shore. After breakfast, Peter and Jesus apparently went for a walk and a private talk, although John followed close

enough behind that he could hear it. Jesus taught Peter: **Love me more than these. Love me by ministering to my people.**

So Jesus asked Peter that question three times. You can't help but notice the repetition. It had to be pretty hard on Peter. Almost everyone who reads this account is reminded of the three times Peter denied Jesus. At the Last Supper, Peter had declared that he was ready to die for Jesus. But that same night, three times, Peter chickened out and denied that he even knew Jesus. So now, Jesus asked Peter three times, "**Simon son of John, do you truly love me?**"

Twice, Peter answered, "**Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.**" But the third time, Peter was hurt by Jesus' question, so he said, "**Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.**" Peter knew that he couldn't prove his love. And he didn't dare to boast about what he was going to do for Jesus again. All he could do was appeal to the all-knowing Son of God's ability to look straight into his heart and know that Peter had repented of his failure and loved his Lord.

Each time Peter answered him, Jesus commanded him, "**Feed my lambs.**" "**Take care of my sheep.**" "**Feed my lambs.**" Jesus was calling Peter to continue in the ministry. That was how Jesus wanted Peter to show his love. Don't you think that's what Peter was looking for that morning when he dove into the water and swam to Jesus and when he dragged that net up onto shore? Peter was looking for a way to demonstrate to Jesus that his love was real. Jesus gave it to him: taking care of his sheep.

That is still how Jesus calls us to show our love for him. It's true in special way for pastors and teachers, but Jesus does call all of us to feed his sheep. When it comes to the church of today, don't you think that one reason why so many people have a negative view of pastors is that too many ministers seem to love themselves a lot more than they love Jesus? God calls pastors and teachers to feed his sheep and take care of his lambs. What does that look like? In the Bible, feeding someone's faith always means applying the gospel to them. We use the gospel in church and in our classrooms and in our homes to teach God's people about their Savior and to prepare their faith for the hard days. We use the gospel when life hurts to assure you that Jesus is there. We use the gospel when you're tormented by your sin and the hurt your sin has caused other people to assure you that Jesus has forgiven that very sin that's wreaking so much havoc in your life and breaking your heart. We use the gospel as life draws to a close to prepare you to close your eyes in this world and open them in heaven. That's feeding Jesus' sheep. The only thing that will keep us committed and humble while we do that is love for Jesus because he took our sins away, too. You know what? That's not just true for pastors. It's true for all Christians in all the ways God calls us to share the gospel.

Peter needed that gospel. He did not deserve to continue in the ministry. But Jesus told him three times to care for his sheep. Even before Jesus gave him that command, he let Peter affirm his love three times. Think about that. Jesus chose to trust Peter's word and promise. Would you trust the love of someone who had betrayed you three times just to save his own skin? Would you even let them claim they loved you or make new promises? Jesus did. He loved Peter and he forgave him and he gave him the chance to recommit himself to serving his Lord.

And Jesus loves us, too. We don't even deserve to be his people, let alone to share in the ministry. But Sunday after Sunday, he assures us that we are forgiven and he lets us promise to try harder today. Jesus lets us promise that we will serve each other's faith. That we will teach our children to know the Lord. That we will share the good news with others. That we will encourage each other with that gospel message. He trusts our promise, because he has taken all our sins away and he has given us faith. And now he calls all of us ministers and all of us members to do this work. Feed his sheep. Take care of his lambs. Show that we love him by serving each other with the gospel. Let's do that, my friends.

## II.

Real love for Jesus isn't just about ministry. Jesus calls all us: **love me more than these. Love me by giving your life to me.** Jesus reminded Peter of his claim to be willing to die for his Lord. He said, "**I tell you the truth, 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.**" What was that all about? Well, John tells us, "**Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.**" Tradition says that Peter was crucified. And Jesus' description certainly sounds like that – hands being stretched out on the crossbar, clothes being taken away whether he liked it or not. Even if Jesus is not being that specific, he clearly told Peter that he would die for the faith. And John says that death

would glorify God. Peter would not chicken out. He would not betray his Lord again. Jesus forgave his earlier failure and restored him to the ministry and that grace motivated Peter to die for his Lord.

Now, thankfully, God does not call all of us to die for the faith. But Jesus does call every Christian to count his life as lost and to give it to his Lord. Jesus does call every Christians to sacrifice our wants and our comfort and our ideas of what we should get out of life and spend all our days serving him. That doesn't mean that Jesus never wants us to be happy or to enjoy life. But it does mean that even when we are having the most fun, we still live as children of God. That takes real spiritual discipline. Even though none of us may ever be asked to deny Jesus or die, all of us face consequences for living our faith. The world we live in doesn't like to hear about Jesus.

Like Peter, it's hard for us to make that kind of commitment. It's so much easier to take the easy way out and put our comfort first. It's easier to hide our faith and avoid the kinds of criticism that can come from wearing our faith on our sleeve. Are we willing to live for Jesus? To make all that we do show our love for Jesus? I can't claim that my life is an example in this. Can you? Who honestly could? So, Jesus came and lived and died and rose again to take away all our failures to live for him. His blood washes away every time we put ourselves first, every time we avoided persecution, every time we hid our faith. He rose to say that it's all gone forever. We are loved. We are forgiven. And that forgiveness gives us the power to commit our lives to serving Jesus, to sacrifice every minute of our lives here to living for him, to even lay down our lives, if God calls us to do that. Jesus is working in your heart through the gospel. Trust him to give you that power.

After hearing that he was going to die for the faith, Peter looked at John and asked Jesus, "**Lord, what about him?**" Jesus answered: "**If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.**" In other words, "Peter, it's none of your business. Your business is following me." I think that tells us a little bit about Peter's thought process. Peter wanted to know if he was the only one who was going to be crucified for the faith. You have to wonder if he wasn't thinking: "That's not fair!"

Don't we think like that sometimes? When God calls us to face something hard, don't we often ask, "Why me?" Don't we wonder why nobody else has to do this? Isn't there just a hint of "It's not fair!" in our thinking, too? Guess what? God doesn't care if we think he's being fair to us or not. He is in his heaven. He looks down on us and on everybody else. He makes the decisions that are best for us. The decisions that will work best to keep our faith alive and bring us home to heaven. And the decisions that will work best to enable us to serve him while we are here, and to be witnesses for the gospel in word and deed for the benefit of the people around us. And he calls us to trust that he knows what he's doing. So, you may think that some family in this church has it so easy, but we have it so hard. And you might even be right. But God says, "Follow me! You focus on the challenges and the opportunities that I lay before you. You focus on loving me by loving those around you, in whatever needs they have. And you let me worry about what's fair and what isn't. Trust my promise that I am doing all these things for your good."

How can we trust that promise? By remembering who made it: Jesus who left heaven itself to live for us here. Jesus, who let his Father pour hell itself out on his head so that we don't have to face it. Jesus who died and then rose to tell us that we are forgiven. And Jesus, who ignores all our failures and trusts us when we say that we love him and we are committed to him. That Jesus comes to us in the gospel and gives us the faith we need to trust him no matter what we face. That trust leads to love that serves him every single day.

Love me more than these. I don't know if Peter really loved Jesus more than John or Andrew or James did. I hope he loved Jesus more than he loved fishing and more than those fish loved Jesus. But the point Jesus was making is simple and it applies to our lives: live me above all else. Put me first in your life and that life will change. Love me and minister to your brothers and sisters in faith. Love me and give your whole life to me. Not because those things earn heaven for us, but because those who have heaven, those who trust in Jesus, love him and show it. Be that kind of Christian. Amen.