

## **SERMON 10 MAY 2015**

### **READING JOHN 21:15-19**

The text verse for the sermon is verse 17: 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.”

The number three was a very important number because it confirmed that something really was true and that it was intentional. When Peter denied Jesus three times previously, it was really a profound event. He really meant it! But now Jesus gives him another opportunity, a second chance by asking him to confirm his love three times. And Jesus is also giving him options of how to show his love. It is clear that according to Jesus - Love is always followed by actions and if he really means it, he must show it through the actions of:

- feeding the “lambs” or the wee ones,
- taking care of the flock,
- feeding the “sheep” or those who are not lambs anymore,
- following Jesus,
- to be a living sacrifice in the name of Jesus.

It is interesting to note that Jesus uses his official full birth name “Simon, Son of John”, to emphasize the importance of the matter.

It is also interesting to see how the writer made use of the words for love in the Greek text. When he speaks of the love of Jesus, he twice uses the word “agape”. When Peter responds with his statement of love, he uses the word “philo”. Why? Because in the Greek language there is a distinction between the love that

God has for human beings and the love of human beings towards God. But interestingly the writer changes the order of words for love in verse 17. In verse 17 he uses in both cases the word “philo” – depicting the love of Jesus as “philo”. My theory would be that Jesus was referring to his sacrifice on the cross. He suffered, although He was fully God, the death of a human being. He showed the love of a “human being” which explains the choice to use the word “philo” and not “agape”. Jesus’ love, of course, is sacrificial love, love that is costly!

And it corresponds with what Jesus said in verse 19 namely that Peter will eventually die a sacrificial death because of his faith.

So in a sense Jesus challenged not only Peter but all the rest of the disciples, you and me included?

If we say that we love God, we need to show it.

We need to show it through our commitment of following Jesus in everything we do and say.

Our actions must reflect the love that we have by our 100% commitment to serving God through lives of faith, hope and love. We need to look spiritually after our wee ones, the children and our youth. We cannot ignore them and wait for them to make their own choices, without us leading and guiding them properly.

We also need to look after one another, as brothers and sisters in faith. We cannot ignore each other, or gossip about one another. The easiest way to fall out with people is to always highlight all our differences. Maybe the time has come for all of us to just accept that God has made us all so different with a purpose. We need to dance with one another, despite our differences, in a dance of God’s inclusive love.

The only way the world will ever see our love for God is through our actions of taking care of one another by ways of helping each other through sickness and health, through bereavements and suffering, through sunshine and rain, through thunder and stormy situations.

The only way our brothers and sisters of faith will ever see our love for God is through our actions of feeding others spiritually and physically, meaning doing charitable work in our everyday living.

The Lord God demands us to love unconditionally and sacrificially in all our relationships on earth. It is no wonder that in the New Testament several writers used the “relationship between a man and his wife” to describe the relationship between God and his church. I guess it is then striking that there is a link between the world’s apathy for God’s love and the high divorce rate among couples. Sacrificial love is where the “I” does not matter anymore but where the “we” or the “other” are more important than my own selfish nature.

Love is clearly not a feeling or a fleeting momentous emotion but a responsibility of action.

One evening before the great Broadway star, Mary Martin, was to go on stage in the musical South Pacific, a note was handed to her. It was from the co-producer of the musical, Oscar Hammerstein, who was on his deathbed. The note simply read: “Dear Mary, A bell’s not a bell until you ring it. A song’s not a song until you sing it. Love in your heart is not put there to stay. Love isn’t love till you give it away.” After the performance Mary was rushed backstage and everyone was asking the same question, “We’ve never seen you perform that way before, what happened?” Mary read them Hammerstein’s note and said, “Tonight, I gave my love away.”

Christian life is like a musical where you and I are the players to tell the world about God's love. If we do not perform in a sacrificial way – if we do not give our love away by giving everything we have, then the world will not understand the love that God has for us - A love that God will not let go - A love that God will sustain and nourish as long as we live it. In the love story of God, we have to and we can only respond to His love through our promise to follow Jesus with grateful hearts. We can only respond with our love through our actions of commitment, responsibility and the willingness to sacrifice the self.

And let us remember we can fool one another by performances of fake love, but we can never fool God or children...Why? Because children know the proof lies in the pudding which brings me to a funny story I read on the internet about exactly this.

*A young lady was sunbathing on the beach when a little boy in his swimming trunks, carrying a towel, came up to her and asked her, "Do you believe in God?"*

*She was surprised by the question but she replied, "Why, yes, I do."*

*Then he asked her: "Do you go to church every Sunday?"*

*Again, her answer was "Yes!"*

*He then asked: "Do you read your Bible and pray every day?"*

*Again she said, "Yes!" By now her curiosity was very much aroused.*

*The little lad sighed with relief and said, "Will you hold my money while I go swimming?"*

May the world, Kirknewton and East Calder know our love without us saying one word!

Amen