



Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

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Sermon Rev Dr André J Groenewald

Reading John 21:1-19

The text verse for the sermon is verse 15:

“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.”

Do you love God? Did/do you feed his lambs and shepherd his sheep?

I am asking these questions because this is really what Jesus is asking of Peter. His love for Jesus must be reflected through his everyday actions of love, mercy, and outreach!

But let's start at the beginning. John is the only Gospel writer who tells us about Jesus' appearance at the Sea of Tiberias.

Jesus appeared to 7 disciples when they were not having any luck catching some fish. To them it was not the best of time for Jesus to appear.

The disciples continued with their lives after the burial of Jesus by doing what they did before they became the followers of Jesus. They were fishermen by trade and most probably lived near the Sea of Galilee or as John says the Sea of Tiberias which was the Roman name of the same lake. In those days they usually used the nights to catch the fish so that they could sell it during the morning.

It was early morning, after a night out on the boat without catching any fish to sell or to eat. Peter was not even properly dressed. He only had his inner garment or at least a loincloth on. His outer garment would have been wrapped around his waist or tucked over his belt.

They must have been frustrated and worried. They must have been wet and cold.

I am sure that they were quite intrigued when the “stranger” on the shore told them to throw their nets at the other side of the wee boat. Even more so when the stranger’s words became true. They caught more fish than they could eat themselves! Then the disciples realised the “stranger” must be the risen Jesus.

When Peter realizes it is Jesus he jumps into the water. A hundred yards is too far out for Peter to have walked; he must have been swimming when he first jumped from the boat.

When they got to the shore, Jesus was waiting for them with a fire and bread and fish, the traditional meal of the first century Jews! John says they caught 153 fish. Ancient miracle stories would stress numbers to heighten the reality of the miracle. The risen Lord has provided them with more fish than they could possibly eat by themselves. The host or the head of the household would usually pass out the bread like Jesus did. They were now sure that it was Jesus and that Jesus was God because only God can overpower death!

And then the story takes another turn. I think Peter must have felt a tinge of guilt. After all it was he that lied three times about his involvement with Jesus. It is therefore not strange that he swims to Jesus. It is as if he wanted to say sorry for his lies. He wanted to show Jesus his commitment and loyalty. Maybe that is the reason why Jesus questioned him about his love and dedication.

It is also no coincidence that Jesus asks Peter, also three times, if he really loves him. And three times Peter said yes. Maybe these three times also refers to the old Jewish tradition whereby a woman who wanted to convert to Judaism was to be refused three times at the temple. After the third time if she persisted, she was allowed to become a Jew. No, Peter is getting the same treatment from Jesus and every time he receives a new message namely to feed the lambs, to shepherd the sheep and to feed the sheep. Jesus forced Peter to learn the hard lesson of a changed life. Everyone who follows Jesus must learn what real believing and loving him means. It means to serve others, and to sacrifice. Peter changed from being confident to being emotional. He felt as if Jesus did not believe him. But Jesus wanted to make sure he was prepared for his life of sacrifice to follow Jesus.

I guess that Jesus was trying to tell Peter and us, it is one thing to say that you love Him but quite another to really show it through your actions! It is one thing to get out of the wee boat and go to Jesus but a lifestyle of hard work and sacrifice to follow him.

To love Jesus is to journey with him every moment of every day. To love him is to take care of everyone around you – even the ones that you despise or not really fancy. Jesus showed his forgiving love to Peter when He did not ponder on the past but focussed on the present and the future. Jesus gave Peter new direction and hope for the future.

And this is exactly the point of our passage:

God is totally different from us. God does not ponder on the past. He removed our past sins and transgressions through his merciful death on the cross. His love is unconditional despite the fact that we sometimes make rules to exclude some people. He judges people by looking at their inner attitudes and not by their status or stance in society or what they have done in the past like Peter. He includes everyone in his plan of grace.

He expects us to do the same. We must love one another as He loved us. God touches our realities often with his unconditional love. He makes us aware of the brokenness of our world and village through our own toils and struggles, grief and pain. He uses ordinary people like you and me, to go out and change the circumstances of the poor, the sick, the downtrodden, and everyone that is vulnerable and needy. He gives us the means to help others despite financial difficulties. He uses all kinds of methods to awaken our conscience to care for people that are so different from us. He uses his Church on earth to be there when no-one else is!

And when this happens there is only one reaction and that is happiness and a deep joy - joy that is followed with love. Love as God has shown it to us - the responsibility to forgive, and to forget, the choice to give without expecting something in return and sacrifice.

But if we do not show this joyful love for God's mercy the world would not know that God appeared to us as the risen Lord – in our brokenness, in our struggles, in our pain and in our loving fellowship with one another.

I once heard this amazing story of a mother who was quite a "toff" and her daughter who were walking down the street. The wee lassie then saw a very dirty beggar sitting on the pavement. She immediately took her hand out of her mother's and ran up to the beggar. Then she hugged him and wished him a pleasant day. To her mother's utter shock she replied: Well if Jesus loves him, so do I!

May we go from this place and shout from the rooftops the risen Lord appeared to us too and changed our lives forever and ever from utter despair to hope!

Amen