

John 21:1-19

3rd Sunday of Easter

April 29, 2001

Do you love me?

I think there are only a few people we might ask that question. A husband, a wife, a parent, a child, a boyfriend, a girlfriend.

Do you love me?

I ask that question when there is evidence that they do not.

Do you love me? No you don't love me – look what you did. See how you are acting. What you say and do does not show that you love me. Do you?

And still I hope - do you love me?

Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these? Jesus asked this question after breakfast. Simon, Peter, had fished all night with the other disciples and caught nothing. Just after daybreak a man called to them from the shore, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” And then this stranger on the shore told them to drop their net on the right side of the boat and suddenly the net was filled with large fish. When another disciple told Peter that it was Jesus Peter jumped into the water and swam ashore. When he and the other disciples arrived on shore they found Jesus cooking fish and bread on a charcoal fire. He served them breakfast. And then after breakfast he asked this question, “Simon do you love me?”

The evidence was clear – Simon Peter did not love Jesus. After he had promised he would die with Jesus he denied that he even knew Jesus, swore to God that he did not know Jesus. Three times.

Do you love me? No, you don't love me – you love your own safety – your own life more than me.

But Peter said, Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.

And Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

A second time Jesus said to him, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”

And Peter answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.

And Jesus said, Tend my sheep.

Jesus said to him a third time, Simon, son of John, do you love me? Peter felt hurt to be asked the third time. He answered, “Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you.

Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. Very truly I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and go wherever you wished. But when you grow old you will stretch out your hand, and someone will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go. Follow me.

That Jesus loves Peter is never in doubt. From the moment he first called Peter to leave his nets behind and to come and fish for people Jesus showed love for Peter. Even on this morning by the sea Jesus served breakfast to a hungry boatload of fishermen. The Lord of heaven and earth, the crucified and risen one cooked some fish – prepared some bread because those he loved were hungry.

That Jesus loves Peter is never in doubt.

And that Jesus loves you.

You can tell better than I how many ways and in how many circumstances Jesus has shown love for you. In the person of parents and friends, in the person of these members of his body Jesus has fed you when you were hungry. When you have fallen in sin he has not turned his back on you but offered a hand to lift you up once more. Even if you have been like Saul, living as an enemy of Jesus, Jesus has been seeking you in order to turn you into a friend. He wants to blind you to everything that is not worthy of Jesus and to give you new vision to see his love and his power and his mercy in your life.

Yes, Jesus certainly loves you and me.

But this morning his question to Peter is now addressed to every person in this room. Do you love me more than these?

More than the fish and the bread? More than all the gifts and blessings my love brings to you.

Do you love me? Jesus asks.

When Peter had three times told Jesus he loved him Jesus made it clear that Peter's love for Jesus would be costly. Someone will fasten a belt around you and lead you where you do not want to go.

Love is always costly. Ask any parent – any child – any husband, any wife, any child. Love costs more than anything else in this life – and rewards more richly also.

Do you love me? Jesus asks. Then feed my lambs, tend my sheep – show love for all my children. It will cost you everything you have but I will always be up before dawn ready to fill your nets with fish, share my meal with you and satisfy your hunger.

And one day when your days of serving are over you will come to my seashore and I will have fish and bread cooking on a charcoal fire and we'll sit and talk and share love for all eternity.