

*When 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." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved 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. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me." Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, "Lord, who is it who is going to betray you?" When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!" So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say that he was not going to die, but, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?" This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true. Now there are many other things Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.*

### **John 21:15-25**

#### **"Do You Love Me?...Feed My Sheep."**

Council Chair, Gail Galfo

At first blush, the Gospels leave Peter in a very poor light. He is going to deny his Lord. And when we think of Simon Peter, that's what we think. Just to say his name is to remind us about his denial of Jesus. I believe John wrote his gospel a long time after the other disciples had died, and, certainly, a generation after Simon Peter had been crucified. So this 21st chapter of John, really, is a tribute to Simon Peter. John wants us to see that Jesus had called Simon Peter to a second ministry.

He gave Simon Peter a second chance, just as he gives to us - time and time again. Simon Peter represents us. Jesus words were spoken through him to the Church. On the shores of the lake in the early morning, Jesus handed Peter the crozier, the staff of the pastoral office, and entrusted him the oversight of God's people. But the truth is more than this. It's important to remember that in the earlier part of this chapter, John tells us that the disciples followed Simon Peter, a natural leader.

We learn from the resurrection story in Matthew's gospel that the disciples had returned home to Galilee because Jesus had promised to meet them there after the resurrection. But when they got there, there was no sign of Jesus. So Peter said to the men in so many words, "Here we are, and there are our boats, let's go fishing!" While it was no crime for the men to fish, more than one commentator has wondered if Peter was flirting with a return to the life he had before Jesus had called him out of his boat years before.

But he, and the other disciples, were unsuccessful that night. Until suddenly a stranger appeared to them on the beach and told them to throw the nets on the right side of the boat. With blind faith, they did so, and their catch was amazing. Strangely, when they were done, the apostle John asked Simon Peter if he knew who the shadowy figure was, and when Simon Peter didn't know, John told him it was "*the Lord*" on shore, the Lord had prepared a breakfast, a coal of fires and had bread and fish on the fire.

Picture Jesus looking over the dying embers of the fire he had made for the disciples from which he had served them breakfast. He looks straight into the eyes of Simon Peter and asks him "*Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these?*" Was he asking Simon Peter if he loved Jesus more than the disciples, or more than the fishing business and his old way of life? Jesus is asking him if he loves Jesus more than everything – the other disciples, the nets, the fish, all of it. And so Jesus then asks if he's willing to give it all up again and follow Him, and Simon tells him he will. After his death, the risen Jesus re-commissions Simon Peter for service.

Peter must have felt that his work and ministry was forever gone, but Jesus calls him back into the fight! I believe this was a time of unique fellowship and restoration between Jesus and Simon Peter. Jesus freed Peter from the bondage of his sin and failure and set him back about the business of serving the Lord and His church. The same is true for each of us. We back-slide but if we find our way back to God, our sins are forgiven. God restores us to a place of service for His glory. He puts us back on the battlefield and puts us back in service. Please remember that you always have a friend in Jesus regardless of how far you've fallen. Curiously, when Jesus is talking to Simon Peter, He sometimes reverts to calling him only Simon, I think when Simon Peter needed correction or when he began to act like his former self – confident and impetuous, Jesus would do this. Simon means "pebble," but his new name, Peter, means "Rock."

Using his old name reminds Peter of his weaknesses. I remember my Mom calling me by my given name of Gail when she needed me to do something. And if I hesitated long enough, out came the “Gail Rosalie.” And if that didn’t work, and Gail Rosalie Kilgore came out, I knew I was in trouble. If you and I today think that we are somebody important, perhaps He would like to tell us just who we really are! Perhaps we are like Simon, who was sometimes impetuous and headstrong, other times he was a wishy washy, molly-coddle fellow who tried to please everybody, still other times he was prone to boast and filled with pride.

So Jesus dealt with him and settled him quietly when he said “*Simon [his old name!] do you love me more than these?*” Jesus is not asking Simon if he loves Him more than fishing, or the breakfast, or more than Simon loved the other disciples. I believe Jesus is asking Simon Peter if he loves Jesus more than the other disciples love Jesus. Jesus is not only asking Simon Peter, but all of us, if we will love the Lord above all else. He is asking us if we are willing to follow Christ. But in order to do so, we have to understand what that means.

Little did Peter understand the fires of testing he would need to pass through to remove the old Simon and be the new Peter. This testing is passed to all of us. It means giving up what you knew before and following Jesus with all your heart. When the Lord asked the rich young ruler to sell everything he had and follow Jesus and have treasures in heaven, the young man was sad. He didn’t want to give up luxury, his riches and all that he had at his fingertips. So too, we fail to recognize what we can absolutely live without in order to follow Jesus.

When the Lord called Paul, who was on his way to becoming a Chief Rabbi, to give up everything to follow Jesus, Paul does so. He gave up what he knew, his security, his pride, his wealth, and the respect he had garnered along the way. Somewhere in our lives, God asks us to give up what separates us from Him – pride, ambition, laziness – and again, giving those up is the only way to love God above all else. So many Christians are fine people. They are noble. But we all have habits - worldly loves and commitments that destroy us. There are fine, able and gifted individuals in churches, but when asked to be put in a place of leadership, they hesitate because they aren’t willing to give up things in their life. Would you give them up?

Our willingness to follow Christ is destroyed just for the lack of willingness to give up a worldly pleasure for Jesus’ sake. Following Jesus also means that you will accept responsibility. When we need him, God never says, “I don’t have time,” “I don’t have the inclination to do that,” or “I don’t have the ability to do that.” Keep in mind that none of us have all the gifts. But there is some gift in all of us that Jesus wants us to share. When Jesus said to Simon Peter, “*Feed my lambs*” and “*Shepherd my flock*,” he wasn’t telling Simon Peter to go to the barn. He was telling him to take care of God’s children. Jesus asks all of us if we love Him, if we’re willing to feed his lambs and care for his children. Where do you start to do so in a church?

Where do you start in the kingdom of God? You start with yourself. You open your heart. You believe in what God is telling you. You start with the children. Build a household of faith. Start where Jesus said, “*Feed my lambs*.” Accept that responsibility. Stop turning your back on those that need you. Stop finding excuses to turn away. Stop being lazy. If you let him, God will show you the way.