

## **Do You Love Me? —Rev. Denise Stone**

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH BIG FLATS NY, 6-2-19**

This morning before I read today's passage and begin the sermon, I want you to consider a couple of questions. Have you ever failed Jesus? And if so, in what way did you fail?

A couple of possible examples would be have you not invited a neighbor to join you at church even though you did feel that God was asking you to do that? Or did you feel led to join a ministry here at church or in the community for which you came up with excuses as to why you couldn't.

Now, I'm not going to ask for personal testimonies, but I do want you to seriously consider these questions as I am reading this morning's text from John 21:15-19.

*<sup>15</sup>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." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." <sup>16</sup>A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." <sup>17</sup>He said to him*

*the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt 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. <sup>18</sup>Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." <sup>19</sup>(He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me." <sup>i</sup>*

Last week we were at the beach – fishing. This week we are still at the beach – but now we are having breakfast with Jesus. In looking at the second part of this larger encounter with the Risen Jesus, we find Jesus turning and specifically addressing Peter.

We do need a little context to understand what happens in today's text.

In Luke, chapter 22, verses 54-62 (NRSV), we are told the following:

*54 Then they seized him (JESUS) and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house. But Peter was following at a distance. 55 When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. 56 Then a servant-girl, seeing him in the firelight, stared at him and said, "This man also was with him." 57 But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." 58 A little later someone else, on seeing him, said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not!" 59 Then about an hour later still another kept insisting, "Surely this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean." 60 But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about!" At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. 61 The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." 62 And he went out and wept bitterly.<sup>ii</sup>*

Peter had told Jesus that he would follow him even if it cost him his life. Then he promptly denied knowing Jesus three times.

This Peter had failed Jesus. This Peter, 1 of the 12 disciples, this Peter, 1 of the 3 disciples that Jesus spent the most time with, this Peter – whom Jesus had declared would be instrumental in the establishment of the early church. The Roman Catholic Tradition actually considers the passage in

Matthew 16<sup>iii</sup> were Jesus says to Simon that he is Peter – the rock, upon whom he will build his church, as establishing Peter to be the first Pope of the Church. It is this Peter who denied even knowing Jesus.

The Luke passage tells us that Peter went out and wept bitterly when he realized what he had done.

So we find ourselves in John's text with Jesus turning to Peter and asking him, "Do you love me?"

The first actual question is "Do you love me more than these?" We don't really know if Jesus was asking Peter if he loved him more than the other six disciples gathered there on the beach or if Jesus was asking if Peter loved him more than his job fishing. Whatever specifically Jesus was referring to, we do know that crux of the question was "Do you love me?"

I want you to put yourself in Peter's shoes. Knowing what you did, knowing how you had failed Jesus – Jesus asks, "Do you love me?" How would you feel? What would you be thinking?

Would you be ashamed, guilt-ridden, or maybe feel defensive?

Scripture tells us that Peter responds, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” And Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.”

A second time Jesus asked, “do you love me?” Peter responded, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” And Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.”

For a third time Jesus asked, “do you love me?” We are told that Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?”

And Peter then said to Jesus “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

Through these 3 questions of “Do You Love Me?” Jesus erases the previous denials and restores Peter in their relationship and in his commitment to serving God.

Peter gives me hope. Give US hope.

Think about the original questions I posed to you. Have you ever failed Jesus? And if so, in what way?

I feel very confident that we can all say that we have failed Jesus. Probably in multiple ways.

Maybe we have failed Jesus in the same type of way that Peter did. Maybe we have denied that we know Jesus – or at least not claimed to know him when we've had the opportunity.

Perhaps we have failed Jesus by not defending the powerless. One of the beacon calls of the Prophets is that we protect the widows, the orphans and the strangers in our land.

Perhaps we have failed Jesus by not using our God-given gifts and talents to honor God or using them to only honor ourselves.

There is a variety of ways that we could think of that represent how we have failed Jesus; how we have failed in our relationship and commitment to God.

I John 1:8-9 tells us, *"<sup>8</sup> If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."<sup>iv</sup>*

The story of Peter and this conversation with Jesus gives us confidence that when we confess and repent of our sins, of our failures, God will forgive us.

The table of Jesus Christ that we will share in a few minutes also gives us hope and confidence. The hope is from the knowledge that the Jesus that Peter met with on the beach that morning is the same Jesus that we worship today. That this same Jesus, who extended forgiveness and restoration to Peter, extends forgiveness and restoration to me and to you.

The confidence is from knowing that this table represents the work of Jesus Christ through his death and resurrection which makes it possible for us to have relationship with God.

As we gather at the Lord's Table this morning let us claim, along with Peter, the hope and confidence that is available to us through the Grace and Mercy of God.

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<sup>i</sup> John 21:15-19, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

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<sup>ii</sup> Luke 22:54-62, (NRSV)

<sup>iii</sup> Matthew 16:18-19.

<sup>iv</sup> I John 1:8-9, (NRSV)