

John 21:15-19

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter,
“Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”
“Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.”
Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”
Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”
He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”
Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”
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.”
Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. Very truly I tell you,
when you were younger you dressed yourself
and went where you wanted;
but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands,
and someone else will dress you and lead you
where you do not want to go.”
Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death
by which Peter would glorify God.
Then he said to him, “Follow me!”

John’s Gospel ends where it began.

In chapter one Jesus calls his disciples. He says, “Follow Me.”

And here in chapter 21 we hear it again: “Follow Me.”

It’s such a different feeling compared to the ending of the Gospel of Matthew.

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We have taken the Great Commission in Matthew 28

And let that single passage define what it means to be sent.

Mathew 28 needs to be read with John 21.

We need to be following Jesus – and then we go out with Jesus.

Here in chapter 21 John corrects us. //

A very old writer helps us get this right with a simple statement:

God is not known -- if God is not loved.

God is love.

And those who claim to know God-- must love God.

So this question becomes the defining question / for every believer:

Jesus asks, "Do you love Me?"

Peter, do you love me? // James, do you love me?

Henry, Isaac – do you love me? // Helen, Tina – do you love me?

Mary – do you love me?

Because what God is all about in the world –

Is not a technical performance – God is not an engineer

Or a politician.

God is a Father, creating a family –

And what every father wants most of all – is to love / and be loved.

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SO in John 21 we see the order that needs to occur.

God wants to change US first – and then we go out to serve

God wants his love to dominate our lives – to transform us –

So that we BECOME the message./

We BECOME the love of God,
filled with the Spirit who cries ABBA – Father!

And THEN - then we carry the love of God into the world,

We carry the very heart of the Gospel – we BECOME the good news.

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It's so easy to put other things first.

It's so easy to get so busy we neglect the really important things. /

Many of us did not have parents who showed love

Some of us had parents who were so broken.

And for the rest of our lives, we struggle to know what love is.

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I have a friend whose father was a partner / in founding a great missionary organization.

Yet the legacy he left his family is one of neglect and pain;

he failed in his most vital calling.

Because he was an important and powerful man in the kingdom,
he lost the simplicity of Christ.

Instead of serving others, he looked for people who could serve his vision.

In the end, he was really building his own kingdom,
and he failed to walk in love. /

He neglected his own children.

Even for those of us who had parents who knew how to show love,

We struggle with intimacy.

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Eugene Peterson writes that we learn three kinds of language.

The first language we learn is the language of intimacy and relationship.

This language is learned before we know how to use words,
but then later includes them. "Papa, mama"

The second language we learn is the language of information:
bottle, water, rock.

We learn about objects, and how to control them.

Finally, the third language is that of politics and motivation:
stop, go, do.

For all of our lives we are schooled in the two languages:
information -- and politics.

Gradually we forget the first language – the most important one.

Our culture teaches us to value information and politics,
but not intimacy!

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SO – who cares?

Why does it matter so much / if we forget the language of intimacy?

Because ALL our relationships / are built on trust and affection.

Our most important relationships –

With friends, with family, with God –
are built on trust and affection.

When we forget the language of intimacy –

We talk ABOUT God – but we don't talk TO God.

When we forget the language of intimacy

we FORGET the language of prayer – the language of the heart.

//

Jesus asks us –

Do you love me?

God is not known / if he is not loved.

//

When we don't know the language of love,

Prayer becomes all about asking for things.

Lord, do this for me – do that for me.

Jesus asks, "But – do you love me?"

/

How can we pray if we don't know the language of love?

/

If the church was merely a business / then no problem,

but if our job is to BE the message –

To carry the Love of God into the world--

and we don't know the language / of intimacy / and of community,

we have a problem!

And if we don't have this depth of relationship with God --

If we don't know PERSONALLY the deep love and approval of God—

Then we go looking for love somewhere else. / Something else takes that place.

And sooner or later our love tanks are empty –

And we find ourselves fighting about silly things –

When the real issue is this:

I don't feel heard.

I don't feel cared for.

I don't feel loved.

I don't know who I can trust.

And this is a hard place to be,

Because to admit these things is to feel very weak and vulnerable.

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But here is a great secret –

It took me fifty years to learn it.

Community is built around weakness, not around strength. //

A few years ago my wife travelled to a conference to assist in ministry.

Called on to do workshops on spiritual and emotional healing,
she proceeded to lead two sessions.

Some good things happened,
but the high point was at the end of her second workshop.

As she was finishing and women around the circle were sharing,
the turn came for a young lady seated beside her.

This woman was mentally challenged.

She said, "I just came because my spiritual mother came.
And I just love the Lord.

"And I know he is healing me because I can walk better today,
and my arthritis isn't hurting me so much.

And I just love Jesus and all he has done for me." /

When she shared this suddenly the Spirit was present,

and my wife found herself weeping / and rejoicing in the goodness of God.

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Community / and intimacy / are built around weakness.

[old song -No one can meet / those of your needs / that you won't let show..]

God meets us through our brothers and sisters.

And he meets us directly – by His Spirit.

The Father wants us, His children /

To know what it is to rest on his lap.

//

Jesus asks, *"Do you love Me?"*

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Maybe you don't know how to answer that question?

Maybe it's become painful, because like Peter, you have denied Jesus.

Maybe for a long time you have run after love

In the wrong places.

Jesus says, *Come home.*

//

But the question is different for us at different stages.

John writes this,

when you were younger you dressed yourself / and went where you wanted;

but when you are old you will stretch out your hands,

and someone else will dress you and lead you
where you do not want to go."

//

There is a stage in our growth as believers
where we become leaders.

Maybe we have oversight of a ministry.

Maybe we are out in the community, leading a bible study.

Maybe we are serving our neighbors.

It takes initiative and courage to lead in a ministry.

Yet those who are strong to lead can forget -- *we still have to follow.*

Jesus reminds Peter – *keep your eyes on Me.*

NO matter how hard it gets –

NO matter what kind of approval you get – or don't get –

Fix your eyes on Me. // Let me lead you.

It doesn't matter / if you have been a believer for 30 years
– or thirty days-

No matter who you are --how old – how gifted –

It always comes back to this simple thing –

Are you following Jesus? //

He asks -- "Do you love Me?"

Peter, do you love me? // John, do you love me?

Abe, do you love me? // Anna – do you love me?

Mary – do you love me?