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Do you love me?

Cholsey

**John 21:15 - 19** 1 Peter 3:8-22

**John 21** <sup>15</sup> 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.'

<sup>16</sup> 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.'

<sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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.' <sup>19</sup> Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, 'Follow me!'

*In one of my favourite Monty Python scenes - from "Monty Python and the Holy Grail," as King Arthur and his knights seek the Holy Grail, they come to a bridge that spans an abyss of eternal peril. A bridge keeper allows people to cross this bridge only if they can answer three questions. Get one wrong, and you're tossed into the pit. Lancelot is the first tested. The keeper asks him, "What is your name?" Lancelot answers. "What is your quest?" Lancelot answers, "To seek the Holy Grail." "What is your favorite color?" "Blue." "Right," says the bridge keeper, "off you go." Lancelot crosses the bridge, amazed this was so easy. The second knight similarly states his name and quest. But the third question is now, "What is the capital of Assyria?" "I don't know that." The knight is hurled, screaming, into the abyss. The third knight, Sir Galahad, is nervous as he's asked his name and quest, but he answers correctly. "What is your favorite color?" Sir Galahad panics. "Blue...no, yellow--Aaaaahhhh," he screams as he is hurled into the pit. Finally, the king steps up. "What is your name?" "Arthur, King of the Britons." "What is your quest?" "To seek the Holy Grail." "What... is the air speed velocity of an unladen swallow?" "What do you mean," asks Arthur, "an African or European swallow?" "What? I don't know that," answers the bridge keeper, who immediately is launched screaming into the abyss. Arthur and his followers thereafter cross the bridge unhindered.*

I guess all of us at times might wonder with some trepidation about what questions we shall have to face from the Lord of Glory at the gates of heaven. And I'm sure Peter must have wondered what Jesus really wanted to say to him.

Maybe the smell of the charcoal fire Jesus had made on the lake shore took Peter back to that terrible night by another charcoal fire when Peter had denied that he even knew Jesus, just when Jesus needed him most – when he was being mocked, and flogged. Peter denied him not just once but 3 times. Wonderful as the resurrection was, it would not have erased that memory and the shame of it. It would be no surprise if Peter wondered whether Jesus ever wanted to speak to him again. Yes they had met and they had spoken. But maybe this was first opportunity to have a proper talk about what had happened, alone together and face to face,

There was only one question Jesus had for Peter when that time came and it is the only question He will have for us at the gates of heaven:

Do you love me? And it's Jesus' chief question of us at any time:

Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me?

Jesus did not ask Peter: *Can you assure me you will never fail me again*

(After all Peter had already tried that once: *Mark tells us that Peter had said at the end of the Last Supper 'Even if all fall away, I will not.'* 'Truly I tell you,' Jesus answered, 'today – yes, tonight – before the cock crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.' But Peter insisted emphatically, 'Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.')

So not *Can you promise me you'll never fail me again* but

*"Do you truly love me?"*

Jesus had plans for Peter, but he didn't ask him: *What talents and skills can you bring to this job* but *"Do you truly love me?"*

P's response is **You** *know that I do* (i.e. *Others might doubt it or judge me but you know my heart*)

But then Jesus asks Peter again and then a 3<sup>rd</sup> time.

3 times P had denied Jesus - and so Jesus give Peter the opportunity to re-affirm his love for Jesus – 3 times

And then each time in response - 3 times - Jesus commissions Peter to look after his flock – that infinitely precious group of disciples that Jesus had left behind to continue his work of bringing God's kingdom to earth.

What a wonderful affirmation of Peter: *I haven't lost faith in you or given up on you but in fact I have a special and important job for you to do*

That 3 fold commissioning of Peter isn't just a commissioning

it is also a 3 fold absolution – a 3 fold reassurance to Peter by Jesus that he has completely forgiven him – so much so that He wants entrust his precious flock to him.

It's not just that Jesus wants to *be* reassured of Peter's love:

He wants Peter to realise that he, Peter, cannot feed and care for others unless he is totally committed to loving Jesus first

The reason is obvious: the one thing that nurtures people, draws them closer to Jesus, enables them to grow is love

We are called to love not just those that we know well, or who we get on with or who are like us, but those who that we don't know well, who maybe we find awkward and totally different from us. And that includes loving and therefore forgiving – those who have really hurt us.

That can be very, very hard

Cartoon: *Vicar: I think Mrs Bloggs, you need to go to a church that specialises in forgiveness*

Forgiving those who have hurt us is not an optional extra for Christians however difficult it might be.

The only way it is possible is if I am committed to loving Jesus first, and that committed love for Jesus comes from receiving his love for me – drinking it in and realizing that he forgives me totally, utterly, completely, however much I might have ignored him, failed him, even denied him. After all, he forgave Peter.

Then I don't have to pretend to be different from what I really am

One of the most impressive things about the gospels is its absolute honesty about the faults and failings of the disciples who after all, were the senior church leaders at the time these stories were being written and read – and especially its honest about the great and revered head of the whole church, Peter.

So I don't need to impress, I can be open and honest about my weaknesses and failings, secure in the knowledge of Jesus' love

And the more I am aware of his grace and forgiveness towards me, the more I can be more accepting and less judging of others. Peter himself had clearly learnt from his experience with Jesus as we heard in those words he wrote in 1 Peter 3:

<sup>8</sup> *Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.* <sup>9</sup> *Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.*

*An older man met and courted a woman of similar age.*

*In the old-fashioned style, he got on his knees in front of her to pop the question. He said, "I have two questions. First, will you marry me?"*

*"Yes, I will," she answered. "And what is your second question?"*

*The older gentleman replied, "Will you help me up?"*

- Jesus didn't get on his knees but he did get on the Cross.
- He doesn't ask us "Will you marry me?" but He does ask us "Do you love me?"
- He certainly doesn't need us to help him up, but amazingly he does need us to help him out  
i.e. to help him continue his work here on earth however tough it might turn out to be, as it did for Peter
- And in response, he not only re-affirms his love for us, but he helps us get up off our creaking knees and enable us to work for him sharing his love with all those we live with, work with, play with, and with all whom we meet – to share that love by what we say, what we do, how we live, by our attitude of heart.

*Do you truly love me ?* That's the question Jesus asked Peter 3 times... and it's the question that Jesus asks of you and me right now.