

LORD, YOU KNOW THAT I LOVE YOU

A confession of soul-damning sin -- A confession of soul-saving faith.

John 21:15-19

TEXT: *When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly 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 truly 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. I tell you the truth, 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!"*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

How much do you love Jesus? To be a Christian in this life and in this world can never be a boring thing, since this question is put before us on a daily basis. Not necessarily by a direct question like: "How much do you love Jesus?" but on the way you live your life in obedience to God's Word.

One of the more poignant moments of our Lord's Passion is the account of how Peter answered this question one moment with the promise that he would die for Jesus, but then within a few hours, he demonstrated his love for Jesus with three cowardly denials. Scripture records the dramatic moment when the truth of his love for the Lord is revealed, not only to the world, but to the Lord Jesus Himself: ***Just as Peter was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.*** Lu 22

How much do you love Jesus? If Jesus were to ask this of us, what would our answer be? Like Peter, our answer should be one that makes two confessions: A confession of soul-damning sins; and, a confession of soul-saving faith -- Both confessions based on Peter's statement, LORD, YOU KNOW THAT I LOVE YOU.

Jesus and His disciples conversed in Aramaic, but the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle John to record this incident in the Greek language which uses two different Greek words often translated as "love." "Agape" love and "Philos" love. The fact that the Holy Spirit Himself uses two different Greek words for "love" begs the question, "Why? -- What difference does the Holy Spirit want to point out concerning the love of Peter and the love of Jesus?"

Jesus first asked Peter: ***Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?*** The Greek word ascribed to our Lord's question is the same one used in John 3:16 where Jesus says: ***God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son...*** That is a deep, powerful and most profound kind of love! In addition, Jesus says: ***do you truly love me more than these?*** Perhaps pointing to Peter's fellow disciples, or his fishing business. This reminds me of Martin Luther's Explanation to the First Commandment: **We should fear, love and trust in God above all things!**

Peter's answer, however, is reflected in the Holy Spirit's choice of another word for love. The word for "love" ascribed to Peter's answer suggests some reservation. That's because the love that Peter had promised had failed! Peter replies: ***Yes, Lord ... you know that I love you.*** This Greek word for love ascribed to Peter is one from which the name Philadelphia comes from, which means "Brotherly love," and the name Philip, which means "lover of horses." While scholars have speculated on this divinely-inspired choice of words for love, one thing is certain: Peter was painfully aware that while he truly loved Jesus, it was NOT the same love that God demands. Peter had not loved Jesus above all things. He had denied Jesus because he feared for his own life. He loved himself more than Jesus.

I would not make too much out of distinguishing between the two Greek words translated as "love" because in every case, love is to be PERFECT LOVE. Jesus says: ***No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.*** Lu 16 And again, our Lord commands: ***Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'*** Lu 10 In these instances, the Holy Spirit uses the Greek word for love that Peter no longer dared to

use. Peter confessed a powerful love for Jesus, but he demonstrated a greater love for himself. This is a soul-damning sin.

And yet, Peter dares to call upon the Lord Jesus to search his sorry heart and say: ***Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.*** His only appeal is to the Lord who judges us on the basis of that other thing that is in our heart: faith in what God has done, out of perfect love, to save us from our miserable selves.

What kind of love do you have for the Lord Jesus? Agape love? Or, Philos love? It doesn't matter, really, because like it was with Peter, it is imperfect and our hearts condemn us. In fact, Scripture says: ***If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*** 1Jn 1 So what hope is there for us? What is essential to our salvation is this: Does Jesus still love us?

It was obvious to Peter that Jesus still loved him. It was obvious to Peter that Jesus still considered him to be His friend. It was obvious to Peter that Jesus had forgiven him completely, for each time Peter answered, ***Yes, Lord, ... you know that I love you. ... Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.*** Jesus said: ***Feed my lambs... Feed my sheep... Feed my sheep.*** What a powerful proclamation of the Gospel of God's full and complete forgiveness of sins! A fallen sinner humbly confesses his sins while holding to the hope that the Lord's love. Each time our Lord reinstates Peter with the command to preach this forgiveness to others!

Jesus came to Peter while he was fishing. Jesus prepared a breakfast for His friends. Jesus addresses Peter to bring out this confession faith. Then the Lord offers Peter another chance to do what he once had been incapable of doing: ***I tell you the truth, 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!"*** Peter would glorify God in the end. He would not fail.

And who can be the best preachers of the Gospel than sinners who know and believe in the love of God through Jesus! This same Jesus has come to us today with His Word and promise of forgiveness and the invitation to continue in His Word and Promise. He even commands us to proclaim what we know to others. Years later, Peter would write that blessed Epistle addressed to all Christians living throughout the world until the end of time. In that letter Peter writes to us: ***You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*** 1Pe 2 What does this mean but that YOU who know what God's forgiveness is all about are called to declare this to others that they might believe and be saved! You are called to confess your faith in Jesus so that they might know the love of God in Christ and with saving faith, love the Savior who has come to us.

That's why we are here today, and every Sunday. The Lord knows that you love Him, and that you know His love for us! And he has called you to follow him and proclaim what it means that HE IS RISEN! Amen.