May 14, 11 John 21:15-24

DO YOU LOVE ME?

Last week we visited with the disciples and Jesus at a lake while they were fishing. They had gone fishing because they had been waiting to see Jesus again, but he had not appeared to them since he appeared to them in the Upper Room. At that time one disciple was missing. Thomas wasn't there. When Thomas joined the disciples following that first visit of Jesus the excited disciples told him that they had seen the risen Lord and had talked with him and all that. Being the skeptic, being the doubter, Thomas didn't believe them. He said, "Unless I put my fingers into his hands and my fist into his side, will I believe." No words from the disciple could change his mind. No evidence they tried to present helped the situation. He, we might say, was from the state of Missouri, the "show me" state. But we can't be harsh with Thomas, can we, because there are so many people in the world today that say the same thing "show me." This past Saturday's paper has a story of atheists that are coming out of the closet. They don't believe the story that Jesus was resurrected. They don't even believe in God. Some people are like those at the foot of the cross that yelled to Jesus to come down from the cross and then they would believe. We really need more people like the repented thief who wasn't looking for a miracle to prove who Jesus was but the grace of God to be upon him as he asked to be remembered in God's kingdom. Which request was answered? People just can't seem to accept the evidence presented in the Bible, or the testimonies of those who wrote the New Testaments, or the hymn writers or even the disciples themselves as found in their gospel messages. If we did, what a different world this would be. Sure they had doubts too. They even questioned the resurrection story of the women until….yes until they saw with their own eyes, touched with their own hands, heard with their own ears the presence of Jesus. It was then they believed.

So no words they could say would persuade Thomas to believe. The proof he needed was a real live Jesus that he could touch himself. On that next week, we all know what happened. Out of the blue with no warning, no trumpet sounds, no ringing of a door bell, no angels proclaiming his coming, with the doors and windows closed and I might add, locked, a figure stands before them once again. The disciples recognized who it was. Before he says one word the figure goes to Thomas and extends his hands with the wounds still there, exposes his side where the spear pierced and said, “Thomas, come and touch my wounds and believe.” A humbled Thomas fell on his knees before the Lord and perhaps with tears in his eyes said, “Lord forgive me for I have sinned. I doubted you had risen. I had doubted the evidence. I even doubted the words from my friends who told me you had risen. Forgive me Lord.” Jesus, perhaps reaching out to take Thomas to his feet, holds his hands and says, *"So, you believe because you've seen with your own eyes**. Even better blessings are in store for those who believe without seeing."*** By the way, that last line includes us.

Now we are at the lake again. Jesus has called the disciples to have breakfast with him. They sit and marvel at all that has happened and are joyful that the risen Lord is with them. You see, their worries seemed over. With Jesus around they always had peace. In the storms of their lives when Jesus was there they never needed to fret for he calmed the seas and stilled the storms. Now they wait to hear what the Master had to say to them that morning by the seaside.

If you had been there that morning for breakfast with Jesus what would you have talked about? Do you think you might have asked Jesus how he knew were the fish were? Would you have asked where he had been since their last get together? Would you have had many other questions on your mind? I think I would have. After all, in my sermons those are my thoughts that I share with you, my questions that come to mind. They might seem silly at

times, but just because the Scriptures are silent about all the details, don't you wonder from time to time? Isn't it asking questions and wondering about things that make the Scriptures come alive?

Well on that day I wonder what was going through their minds as Jesus handed out the bread and fish and they feasted around the open fire. Maybe they had their questions but it wasn't the disciples that began the conversation, it was Jesus. And his words really weren't directed toward all the disciples, though I'm sure they were meant for them all. No! He directed his attention to one man only. Maybe as he dished up some more fish and chips for Peter reminiscence of his giving the bread and wine at the Last Supper he began his conversation with him. John tells us about that. Listen to what he records**. John 21:15-24**

After breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"

"Yes, Master, you know I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." [16] He then asked a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" "Yes, Master, you know I love you." Jesus said, "Shepherd my sheep." [17] Then he said it a third time: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was upset that he asked for the third time, "Do you love me?" so he answered, "Master, you know everything there is to know. You've got to know that I love you."Jesus said, "Feed my sheep.

Great story isn't it. I'm sure you have heard the stories of the different kinds of love found in this passage. You know the two different Greek words that are used between Jesus and Peter. Jesus asks Peter the first two times if he loves him with such a love that goes far beyond any understanding, and Peter comes back by saying that he loves Jesus as a friend. Then Jesus changes his word and asks Peter if he loves him as a friend, and Peter then replies, "Yes Lord, I do."

That in itself makes a great sermon because it brings us into the story because sometimes we have to think about how much we love God. Now we don't understand the difference in the word "love" used here because in our English language we use the same word to describe a close relationship or how we feel about a certain vacation spot, or even the clothing someone is wearing or a good place to eat. We say, "Oh, I love how you fixed your hair this morning." Or "I loved your pie, can I have your recipe." With that one you can say, "Yes, I put it in our new United Methodist Women cookbook. Why don't you pick one up today?"

You see, we use that same word in different ways. But in the Greek there are three words used to define different kinds of love. One is *Eros,* which is the erotic love. Another is *phileo*, which is a brotherly-sisterly, friendship kind of love. The town of Philadelphia would be an example of that because it is called the 'the city of brotherly love.' And finally there is that higher, real strong- way- up -there kind of love that puts others first, and is a willing- to- die- for- you kind of love that we call God's love, which is the word *agape*.

It was that way up there love that would die for you kind of love Jesus asked Peter about and each time Peter came back with the love that was full of friendship. Finally, knowing I guess what would come to be, Jesus said, 'Peter do you love me like a friend?" His final reply was, "Yes Lord I do."

That will preach. Why? Because our love for God and Jesus gets called into question. How much do we love God? What kind of love do we have for him? Is our love a deep love that Wesley says we can have? You know the kind Scripture talks about, you know loving God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, with every fiber of your being. Or is it a kind of love that you only talk to God when you need something or you are in

trouble and need a way out… or that kind of love that is locked in the back closet of your mind that you open only in critical times.

We know the kind he has for us because we know that 'God so loved the world that he gave us his one and only son that whoever believes in him can have eternal life.' The Greek word used there is that *agape* love, the high love, the love that cost something, the love willing to die for you kind of love. That's the kind of love God has for each of us. That's the kind of love Jesus demonstrated to the world on the cross.

What would you have replied if you were Peter? Remember, Peter had been one of the big three. He had the ear of Jesus. He was right there on the Mount of Transfiguration when Moses and Elijah appeared. He heard God's voice telling him to listen to Jesus. HE was the one that Jesus gave the keys to the kingdom. Peter was humbled at the honor that was bestowed upon him by Jesus. So in reality we think Peter must have loved God with all his heart, his soul, his mind, his strength. But we also know this. Peter had not finished growing yet. His faith seemingly strong took a hit the night he betrayed Jesus three times. And the final one was the last straw because after all they had been through these past 3 years, at the fire, instead of standing tall saying yes, he was a follower of Jesus and he was proud of it, he tries to hide his face, his shame, as he denies even knowing him. Then his old sailor saltiness comes forth from his mouth as he curses and when he turns around from warming his hands by the fire his eyes meets Jesus eyes as Jesus is being led to his trial like a common criminal. Peter knew Jesus had heard his denial. The whole world heard his denial. An ashamed, tearful Peter begins to retreat to find safety. Or maybe he was just looking for a hole he can could climb into. Ever felt like that when <u>you</u> have denied Jesus by your words or your actions?

“Peter do you love me?” Jesus asks. Oh, by the way, I’m sure you figured it out. Jesus doesn’t ask him once, not twice, but three times if he loved him. You have perhaps heard sermons about that as well, that Jesus asks him three times about his love because Peter had denied him three times. That certainly could be the case. But maybe it is deeper than that. Maybe it is to see where Peter’s faith is at this time. He had a big task for Peter that Peter had no inkling about. Was Peter prepared? Were any of the disciples prepared? This seaside breakfast wasn’t by accident. It was a faith check meeting in preparation for what was to be in the future. Jesus called them 3 years ago to leave what they were doing to come follow him for they wouldn’t be using nets to round up schools of fish, but wider nets of God’s word through the power of the Holy Spirit that would fall on ears that would hear, and hearts that had been prepared for God’s kingdom.

“Peter do you love me?” Seems like a simple question for all of us this morning. There was no denying Peter’s love for the Master, not really. After all he did leave his nets and followed him. Something attracted Peter to Jesus. He began his journey like any person who becomes a Christian. First, you believe, next you follow. But he did have his fall, didn’t he. He fell from grace just for a moment and then we realize that he is our example as well because sometimes we do it too. We become doubting Thomas’ thinking God can’t help out our situations. We become Peters when we deny knowing Jesus by turning our backs not just on him, but on his way of life. Oh we don’t mean to do it. But it happens. Sometimes it happens too often. That mean old serpent knows our every weakness. He knows how to be subtle in his approach to each person. “Let’s see just how much you love God” he thinks as he goes after every Christian with his bag of tricks. “Let me see how many I can get to betray Jesus” he thinks as he thinks of new schemes each new day. And folks, he’s a patient devil, isn’t he. He knows we might not fall for the big stuff, but little by little, he worms his way into your life without you even knowing it. He too, is a fisherman,

who casts his line our way and uses fancy hooks to lure us in…..then he pulls the line tight as he sets the hook and it takes hold and he laughs as he reels you in as you try and wiggle your way free.

“Peter do you love me?” Jesus asks. Perhaps looking around at all the disciples who were still finishing their breakfasts and listening to the conversation Jesus points to them all and says, “Peter, do you love me more than all of these?” Maybe Peter didn’t know what to say. Was Jesus questioning his love for his friends? Was Jesus questioning the love of his friends for Jesus? Was he questioning Peter’s love? Did Peter really, really love Jesus?

Thinking of that breakfast scene and the conversation between Jesus and Peter I am reminded about the conversation that happened between Tevye and Golde in “Fiddler on the Roof” when he has decided to let one of his daughters get married. The conversation goes like this:

(Tevye) "Golde, I have decided to give Perchik permission to become engaged to our daughter, Hodel." (Golde) "What??? He's poor! He has nothing, absolutely nothing!" (Tevye) "He's a good man, Golde. I like him. And what's more important, Hodel likes him. Hodel loves him. So what can we do?

It's a new world... A new world. Love. Golde..." Do you love me? (Golde) Do I what? (Tevye) Do you love me? (Golde)

Do I love you? With our daughters getting married

And this trouble in the town you’re upset, you're worn out Go inside, go lie down! Maybe it's indigestion (Tevye) "Golde I'm asking you a question..." Do you love me? (Golde) You're a fool (Tevye) "I know..." But do you love me? (Golde) Do I love you? For twenty-five years I've washed your clothes Cooked your meals, cleaned your house Given you children, milked the cow After twenty-five years, why talk about love right now? (Tevye) Golde, The first time I met you Was on our wedding day I was scared (Golde) I was shy (Tevye) I was nervous (Golde) So was

I (Tevye) But my father and my mother Said we'd learn to love each other And now I'm asking, Golde Do you love me? (Golde) I'm your wife (Tevye) "I know..." But do you love me?

(Golde) Do I love him? For twenty-five years I've lived with him Fought him, starved with him Twenty-five years my bed is his If that's not love, what is? (Tevye) Then you love me? (Golde) I suppose I do (Tevye) And I suppose I love you too (Both) It doesn't change a thing But even so After twenty-five years It's nice to know

"Peter, do you love me?" Jesus asks. And each time Peter tells him, "Lord you know I do. We've been through thick and thin these last few years, Lord you must know I love you." But it is that last time, just like the last time he denied Jesus, the one big one…the one that brought shame to Peter; this third time Jesus asks, "Simon, son of John, do you love me like a friend?" I see Peter's blood pressure beginning to rise like it did when he betrayed Jesus that third time. Even his voice gets louder and cracks a little and he is a little angry with Jesus for questioning his love. "Master, you know everything there is to know. You've got to know that I love you like you were my brother."

"Master, you know everything." How true. It's almost like Peter is saying one of the psalms…. "Search me O Lord, and know my thoughts….test me and know my anxious ways… and then lead me in the way everlasting."

My friends let us never forget that Jesus knows what's in every heart, every thought in every mind, every word that is upon each ones lips. He knows the depth of each love. But he still asks…. "do you love me? Do you love me enough to trust me? Do you love me enough to go where I send you? Do you love me enough to let go and let me run your life? Do you really and truly really, really love me more than these? (Whatever those 'these' are in your lives.) Do you really, really love me as much as I love you?"

After their conversation Tevye says to Golde, “Then you love me?” And Golde replies, “I suppose I do.” Jesus asks each of us, “Do you love me?”

And your answer is…….