

CCLEB SERMON

NOTES

SUNDAY APRIL 28, 2024
JOHN 21:15-25

PASTOR MILES DISSINGER

This morning we are going to finish up our journey through the book of John. We have spent the last several months walking through this incredible book, and it is our hope that you have learned as much as we have as we have studied and prepared the teachings that God has directed.

We will finish the book today, and next week, Pastor Thom will give a complete overview of the entire book.

John is truly a wonderful book...with recurring themes, and language, and most importantly, it is an eye witness account from an author who walked in the same footsteps as Christ. He saw with his own eyes the miracles, teachings and love of Christ.

Last week, pastor Duane led us through a beautiful scene on the beach of the Sea of Galilee...Quite possibly in the same area where Jesus first called some of His disciples.

The disciples, confused and unsure, decided to return to their old lives and went fishing. After catching absolutely nothing, Jesus appears on the shore and directs them to try one more time...throwing their nets on the right side of their boat.

The disciples follow the instructions of Jesus, and suddenly caught an enormous amount of fish. As we learned last week, this was not the first time something like this happened. Jesus had directed this type of miraculous catch before...When He first called these same men to leave their old lives behind and follow Him...

Luke 5: 4 - 11

There is no doubt that these men would have be immediately reminded of this first encounter with Jesus, and the similarity of the catch.

But...they had not followed the last words of Jesus from that first meeting. They were no longer fishing for people. They had very quickly reverted back to their old life of fishing for fish.

And Jesus appears to them for the third time, to set them back on the right track. To remind them that they have put their old life aside...and must continue to walk in the fullness of the new life that God had given them.

I absolutely love the way that Jesus works here...basically repeating the scene of their very first encounter to remind them of how this incredible three year journey began. To draw up those same feelings and emotions and wake them up from the trauma induced fog that they were in.

We pick up this morning on a beach on the Sea of Galilee. A nice fire blazing and Jesus had prepared breakfast for His friends, a super nice gesture!

So after a hard night of work...their bellies full...a nice fire going...Jesus addresses Simon Peter in front of the rest of the group.

John 21: 15-17

There is so much in these three verses alone that we could probably spend a couple Sundays just on these passages.

The first thing to note here are some of the purposes for Jesus addressing Peter in this manner in front of the group. Peter was a leader among the disciples. He was respected. And he had failed miserably in the courtyard the night Jesus was arrested.

It was important for Jesus to reinstate Peter as that leader in front of the rest of the disciples. And He does this by asking Peter a question...

“Simon, son of John, Do you love me more than these?”

The first thing to note is that Jesus addresses him as Simon, Son of John, and not as Peter. This would have been a tip off to me if I were Peter.

I am sure that many of us here know exactly what it meant when our Mother called us by our full name...or our first and middle names!

If I ever heard “Miles Richard”...I knew immediately that I better start paying attention to what I was doing, or what I was saying...or the results might not be in my favor!

Jesus asks Peter if he loves Jesus more than “these”.

There are some scholars who interpret this question as Jesus asking Peter if he loves Him more than the fish...meaning more than his old life. I can understand that interpretation, and there are lessons to draw from that as well.

We have to love Jesus enough to give up our old life or He cannot use us to our full capacity. We have to be willing to walk away from the things that Jesus calls us to leave behind, or we may never walk into the new life that God has laid out for us.

That being said...I believe Jesus is asking if Peter loves Him more than the rest of the disciples. If we look back to the night Jesus was arrested, Jesus predicts the denial of Christ by Peter, and Peter responds this way...

Matthew 26:33

After this declaration by Peter, he goes on to deny Jesus 3 times in the high priest’s courtyard. I believe that Jesus is taking this opportunity to give Peter the chance to recognize and come to terms with his failures, and do so in front of the other disciples.

Now, Before we go any further, we have to note that there are three words for “Love” in the Greek language...and each of the words has a different meaning.

1. Eros: which means a romantic love
2. Philea: Which means friendship or companionship
3. Agape: Which means selfless, self-sacrificing and unconditional love

When Jesus asks Peter whether or not he loves Him more...Jesus uses the word Agape. So in other words, Jesus is asking Peter, “do you love me enough to sacrifice everything for me?”

When we come to Christ, this is the type of love that we are required to love Jesus with. A love that knows no bounds. A love that says we will follow Him wherever He leads us.

But when Peter responds to the question, he uses the Greek word “Philos”...meaning he loves Jesus in a friendly way. The way you would love a companion. This is a very different kind of love than the love Jesus asked about.

Jesus asks, “Do you love me unconditionally, putting yourself aside?”, and Peter answers by saying, “Yes, I am your friend.” You can feel the contrast between the question and the answer.

None the less...Jesus says to Peter, “Then feed my lambs”.

This dialogue repeats itself again, with Jesus asking the same question a second time using the same word for love...“agape”. And a second time, Peter response with the same word for love, “philos”.

And Jesus responds this time saying, “Then take care of my sheep”. Some translations say “tend to my sheep”.

Regardless of the fact that Peter responded with a different word for love than Jesus used, Jesus makes it very clear what He wants Peter to do. He wants Peter to look after and care for and feed His sheep.

And who are Jesus’ sheep? Jesus’ sheep are God’s people...those who would come to know Him and follow Him and seek Him.

David Guzik said it this way...

After Jesus asked and Peter answered, Jesus twice gave Peter an instruction regarding how he should act towards God’s people. The idea was that Peter could demonstrate his claimed love for Jesus by feeding Jesus’ lambs and by tending Jesus’ sheep. Jesus emphasized that they were His sheep, not Peter’s.

The original verb used in this second command by Jesus has a broad meaning. The commentator Morris put it this way...

It means to ‘Exercise the office of shepherd’ over against simply ‘Feed’.”

The commentator Clarke said this...speaking of the word Jesus chose...

“By which he seems to intimate that it is not sufficient merely to offer the bread of life to the congregation of the Lord, but he must take care that the sheep be properly collected, attended to, regulated, guided, and it appears that Peter perfectly comprehended our Lord’s meaning, and saw that it was a direction given not only to him, and to the rest of the disciples, but to all their successors in the Christian ministry.”

I was talking to someone at church last week about this week’s teaching, and this person gave me a very interesting insight that I had not thought of before.

These men were fishermen. Their job was to catch fish, kill the fish, and then gut the fish. Unless you are catch and release fishing, that’s what fishing is. Commercial fishing requires killing the fish.

Now Jesus is calling these men to be shepherds. A shepherd cares for the sheep. Feeds the sheep. Protects the sheep. Lays down his own life for the sheep.

Jesus was taking these men from an occupation that required taking life, to an occupation that consisted of giving life.

It's very much like our sinful lives before we came to Christ. Before Christ, we are destructive and our sin leads to death. But after Christ, we have life and life everlasting.

What a beautiful way to look at the work that Jesus is doing on this beach on the Sea of Galilee!

The words that Christ chose here indicate another "passing of the torch" moment. And it wasn't just for Peter to hear...but all the disciples who would carry on. And not only the disciples, but also instructions for anyone who would come afterward and lead in ministry.

How do we show our unending love for Jesus?...take care of His people! We focus our personal ministries around love and compassion and care for those God puts in our lives.

I think of the amount of food that is freely handed out each Sunday at our church. And the countless mouths fed by the many ministries that are supported by our food pantry.

I think about our benevolence program, where we help those in need when they come into a rough time in their lives financially, and our financial counseling ministry to help people stay on the right track.

I think about our residential ministries and those we support, that give a safe place to live to men and women who are going through a time of healing from addiction. A place where they can be loved on and grow in their knowledge of the Lord. And a place where they can find a family to surround themselves with.

I think about the Word of God...the true sustenance that we need, that is taught from this pulpit week after week, as well as in our many weekly bible studies.

And I think about comments we have heard by folks who attend Calvary Chapel Lebanon who tell us that the thing that keeps them coming back is the love that they feel when they walk through those doors.

And none of that is to boast or brag about this church...it is to boast and brag about the goodness of our God! HE is the one who provides every resource. We simply strive to use what He provides to "take care of His sheep"!

That is what Jesus means when He tells Peter to feed His lambs...to take care of His sheep...to tend to His sheep. I absolutely love being part of a church family that understands how to love on God's sheep!

Back to our text...Jesus then asks Peter one more time... A THIRD TIME...if Peter loves Him.

John 21: 17

Jesus asks a third time, the same question...and we read that Peter is hurt by the fact that Jesus would ask him yet again. But I also have to believe it didn't take long for that number 3 to sink in to Peter's mind.

Three times Peter had denied knowing Christ...Three times he had failed Jesus in the courtyard. And now, three times Jesus asks the same question..."do you love me".

I can't imagine the pain in Peter's heart as he relived those moments where he had failed so badly. But I believe it was also because of that shame that Peter was carrying that Jesus sought to build him back up in front of the group...giving him the command to get back to work. Get back to what I have taught you to do. Get back to being a shepherd for my flock.

It's interesting to note that when Jesus poses this question a third time, he changes things up and uses the same word that Peter used to respond to the first two questions..."Philos".

It's almost as if Jesus is saying, "fine, you want to tone down the love you have for me...watch this..."

And Peter, maybe having gotten the hint...responds using the word "agape". After connecting the dots, putting the pieces together and the significance of Jesus asking three times just as Peter had denied three times, I believe Peter finally got it.

"Yes Lord...I truly do love you with all I have...unconditionally and without reservation. I know I failed, but I am ready to lay down my life and go where you lead."

And again, Jesus responds with the command to feed His sheep.

I view this as a time of recommissioning. The disciples so quickly ran back to their old life of fishing, and now Jesus returns to get them back on the path He had laid out for them.

He reminds them all...through His words to Peter...that His great plan for them is to build the flock and care for the flock. To continue what Jesus started when He chose them. And to remind them that they are indeed CHOSEN and the work is not yet finished.

I want to point out one more thing before we move on to our next verses. Each time Peter responds to the question Jesus is asking, he indicated that Jesus already knows the answer. And of course Jesus already knows the answer...He's Jesus!

So then why would Jesus ask the question?

As believers, in our journey of discipleship, there will be times when questions arise that are asked to me us think. They cause a self-examination and force us to take a very deep and honest look at where we are.

Listen to how the commentator Maclaren put it...

"Jesus Christ asks each one of us, not for obedience primarily, not for repentance, not for vows, not for conduct, but for a heart; and that being given, all the rest will follow."

Because of the fact that Peter denied Jesus three times, it is very appropriate that Jesus asks this question to Peter..."Do You love me?" And even more poignant that He asks Peter three times instead of just once.

Three times Peter is made to examine his heart... to search out where he truly stands when it comes to his complete devotion to his Master. Jesus asked because He knew that the answer to this question would be the guiding factor in Peter's journey ahead. And not only Peter's journey, but the road that all the disciples would walk from that day forward.

Jesus then continues to address Peter...

John 21: 18-19

Jesus now transitions to a new line of conversation with Peter. And He begins by making it very clear that what He is about to tell Peter is THE TRUTH.

When Jesus starts a dialogue with "I tell you the Truth"...you had better listen, because something worth hearing is coming your way!

Jesus first reminds Peter of the days of his youth. He was able to go where he wanted to go, do what he wanted to do, and live as he wanted to live. He was the master of his own life.

We can all probably connect to that picture in some way. I know that when I was young, I did whatever I wanted...for better or worse. And if I'm being honest, most times for worse.

But I thought I knew best how to live and conduct my life, and fun and pleasure were at the forefront of my mind. When we are young, we don't often think about what it will be like to age and grow older. We live in the moment.

That was the life of Peter when he was young...very similar to most of us I'm sure.

But then Jesus turns his words to Peter's future. He says, "But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will dress you and take you where you don't want to go."

Jesus is not telling Peter that he will someday end up in a retirement home and have nurses dress him and take him to the Saturday night bingo gathering that he desperately doesn't want to go to.

Jesus is referring to path that God has laid out for him. Ultimately Jesus is giving Peter a picture of how his life will end because of his full and total surrender and dedication to following Jesus.

Down the road, Peter will be bound in captivity and carried to a place of crucifixion. His arms will be stretched out, as Jesus said, on a cross as he dies the death of a criminal just as Jesus did.

And while this news must have been wrenching for Peter, in some ways, it may have also provided him with confidence and strength to go on.

Again, David Guzik wrote this concerning this exchange between Jesus and Peter... Yet it also gave Peter assurance. In the crucial moment a few weeks before, Peter denied Jesus three times to save himself from the cross. Jesus assured Peter - ("I tell you the truth") - he would face the challenge of the cross once again and he would embrace it. Jesus promised Peter that he would die in utter faithfulness to his Messiah and Lord.

Verse 19 says, "Jesus said this to let him know by what kind of death he would glorify God. Then Jesus told him, "Follow me."

So here, John confirms that Jesus said these words so that Peter would have knowledge of how he would die. Imagine the solidification of the faith of Peter through this conversation.

He was made to recount his three denials by Jesus asking him three times if he truly loved his Master.

Then He was told that he is being given another chance to show his full dedication...and this time he will succeed. Remember, Jesus isn't saying that you'll have another choice and you may or may not go through with it. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth"...you are going to die this death, in full and total surrender.

Peter's success will be a gruesome death on a cross, just as Christ suffered, that will GLORIFY GOD!

This time around...Peter will bring glory to God through his faithfulness...Just as Jesus did...by dying the same way that Jesus did.

And the way that Jesus ends this snippet of the conversation is absolutely incredible to me. It really sums up the amazing way that Jesus connects the dots in our lives and in our walks of faith. The way He resets us and brings us back to the beginning...to our first love...when we desperately need it.

Jesus simply says..."Follow Me".

I get emotional just thinking about it. Peter had heard those words before from Jesus.

Let's look back at the first time Peter meets Jesus...on a beach, maybe in the same area they were now standing three years later.

Mark 1: 16-18

Jesus now brings Peter's thinking back to the very beginning of his time with Jesus.

To me, it's as if Jesus is saying... "what has happened, happened. And that time is now dead and gone. And I know that you won't fail me again. So put that behind you, because it's behind me. Remember your calling, and follow me".

Two words..."follow Me"...coming from the mouth of Christ, to reset Peter back to the man that Jesus had raised him up to be. Two words to remind the disciples that the work is not yet finished. Two words to put them back on the path that Jesus had called them to walk down.

Now...we know that Peter is flawed. As were all the disciples. As are all of us here today! And as the scene continues, it is clear that Peter is still in need of grace.

He has a thick head and a quick tongue...(guilty)...and instead of acknowledging the previous words of Jesus...he immediately shifts the conversation to someone else.

John 21: 20-23

Peter immediately deflects the conversation to someone else. "What about him?". And Jesus replies basically saying, "what concern is that of yours? I'll deal with John however I see fit".

Then one more time, Jesus repeats his original command to Peter to "follow me". Jesus finishes his conversation with Peter on the beach that day in the same way that he started His conversation with Peter three years earlier. He ends where he began with the simple command, "follow me".

We see in verse 23 that because of this question posed by Peter, rumors spread among the fellowship about the fate of John and when the Lord will return.

John is clear to set the record straight in his writing, saying that "that isn't what Jesus said". But there is a great lesson here for all of us.

This is what happens when we are more concerned about what God may be doing in someone else's life instead of focusing on what God is trying to in our own lives.

Rumors are BAD. And I'm not talking about the Fleetwood Mac album. That's a great album! In fact..if you look at the song list from that album...Jesus is really telling Peter that I have prepared YOUR way...and you need to "GO YOUR OWN WAY"! Ok...enough of that.

In all seriousness...I'm talking about what happens when we engage in the "he said, she said" stuff.

Spurgeon wrote this concerning this passage...

"I have come to the conclusion that, instead of trying to set all my Master's servants right at once, my first and most important work is to follow my Lord; and I think, my brother, that it will be wise for you to come to the same conclusion."

Our responsibility is to focus on our own faith journey and where we stand in our walk...not where someone else may be on their walk.

Now that's not to say that we shouldn't encourage each other, and help each other when the need arises, but when our focus shifts to the accomplishments or failures of others, and we begin to compare others with where we are...we can very quickly lose focus of our own walk.

You may even see jealousy begin to manifest. And the enemy is just looking to use things like that to throw us off course. Don't let that happen to you!

Guys...we have reached the end of the book of John. Let's take a look at the last two verse where John sums up the absolute validity of his writings.

John 21: 24-25

John...an eye witness to the public ministry of our Lord and Savior, ends his Gospel account by stating that all he has written is the truth and nothing but the truth.

But...he also makes it clear that there is much, much more that Jesus accomplished in His public ministry that was not recorded in this book.

And that is a testimony to the greatness of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. After working through this eye witness account of all the amazing, life changing, world altering miracles and wonders of our Lord...John lets us know that this is so much more.

There is so much more...and one day...we will all get to sit around with John, and with Jesus, and listen to those stories. To bask in the glory of our Lord, and to marvel at the majesty of our Jesus.

So...How do we apply today's teaching to our lives today?

I want to touch on 3 things this morning.

1. There will be times when God questions us. And when He does...use that time to take a serious and deep look inside yourself.

Try to discern what God is trying to show you or teach you through the questions that are being asked of you.

Those questions may come from His Word as you read and study. They may come from this pulpit as we pose questions in our teachings. They may come from a brother or sister in Christ...someone you confide in. Or they may come from that still small voice inside your head when God speaks to you quietly...prompting you to think and ponder.

These questions are a good thing. Use them to grow!

But this only works if you humble yourself and are completely honest with yourself. While it is often easy for us to see the faults of others, it can be very easy to overlook our own deficiencies.

2. If you love Jesus...then you must love His people!

Just as Jesus told Peter to take care of His sheep...we too must love and care for those whom God sends us.

Your personal ministry should be defined by the love that you show to those around you!

In two weeks, we will begin the book of 1 st Corinthians. And when I think about our personal ministries being defined by love, I immediately think about **1 Corinthians 13: 1-3**

Those verses really sum it up. No matter what we accomplish in our personal ministries, if our defining characteristic isn't love, then we aren't doing it right. We are missing something, and we need to reevaluate.

And that's not easy! We can see how difficult it is by simply looking at the world of hatred around us. As fallen people, our default will always be hatred.

Love takes work! Love takes dedication! And most importantly, true love requires the presence of God in our lives. Because how could we even know what love truly looks like if we don't know God. God is love.

If you love God...show it by loving God's people!

3. Stay focused on your own growth and your own faith journey.

While it is always appropriate for us to come along side each other, build each other up, look after each other and care for each other...we must be careful to not get wrapped up in what God is doing for someone else.

Do not allow the movement of God, or the provision of God in someone else's life to cause jealousy in your life.

And just as importantly, don't allow what you THINK God may be doing to cause you to spread rumors. Rumors quickly turn in to gossip, and gossip leads to destruction.

There are few things that will destroy friendships, families, or churches quite as fast as gossip.

So be a person that stays focused on your own walk and your own growth in the Lord. Be a person who keep their eyes fixed on what the Lord has for you...encouraging and celebrating what God is doing in the lives of those around you, but not being consumed by it.

Your challenges for the week ahead...

1. Seek those areas that God might be trying to grow you by the questions you are being asked.
2. Stay focused on the path that God has laid out before you.
3. LOVE LIKE JESUS LOVED!