

### DO YOU LOVE ME?

Do you ever get down? You make some bad decisions, or you hurt your best friend, or you fail a test, or you are grieving a loss, or your marriage falls apart, you can't find a job, and you feel awful. It could be any number of things - but you're down. If you have ever been there - or if you are there right now - then you can identify with Peter and the story we heard today.

The disciples had been fishing. After bringing their boats to shore, they saw a charcoal fire and smelled fish cooking on the flames. Jesus was there and he invited them to have breakfast. After they had finished eating, Jesus said to Peter, "Do you love me?" "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you," replied Peter. Again Jesus asked him, "Do you love me?" And again Peter replied, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." A third time Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me?" And a third time Peter replied, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you."

What's going on here? Three times the question. Well, this story invites us to hear another story. A story which had happened just a week or so earlier. A story about Peter. A story which also had three questions. There was a fire. Peter was standing by the fire warming himself. Inside, Jesus was on trial before Pontius Pilate. A woman came up to Peter and looking at Jesus she asked Peter, "You are not one of this man's disciples, are you?" Peter denied it. A second time he was asked whether he was a disciple of Jesus. A second time he denied it. A third time he was asked and a third time he denied it. Three questions, three denials.

And so when Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me?" - not once, but three times - Peter must have had flashbacks to that night when Jesus was on trial and Peter was standing by the fire, warming himself. Peter must have cringed each time Jesus asked the question. Peter knew that he had denied Jesus three times. He knew he had let Jesus down. He knew that he had hurt his friend. But then something happened. And it happened on Easter. Peter learned something about Jesus, something very exciting! He learned that Jesus had forgiven him. He learned that Jesus loved him with a love that keeps on loving, no matter what. He learned that Jesus relates to people with grace and not with punishment or revenge.

This happened the first time Peter saw Jesus after that night of terror when he denied that he knew Jesus at the very moment Jesus was on trial and about to be crucified on a cross. On Easter evening, the day Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples were meeting together. Jesus came. "Peace be with you," he said. He forgave the disciples, all of them. Peter was there, and Jesus forgave Peter and Peter knew he was loved.

That's exactly the same gift which Jesus gives to you today. Jesus rose from the dead to make a difference in your life. No matter what you have done, no matter what kind of a mess you have made, no matter how many times you have failed the Lord, you are forgiven. No matter how many times you have turned away from him, Jesus turns to you and gives you the gift of peace. His love for you keeps on coming, no matter what. You are loved. You are forgiven. It is a gift from God. A gift for you.

But it doesn't stop there. "Do you love me?" asks Jesus. Can you hear yet another story in this story? Can you hear your own story? Can you hear the Lord asking you, "Do you love me?" Not just once. Not just twice. But over and over again. And each time the Lord says, "Feed my sheep." "Feed my lambs."

You see, Jesus not only forgives you, but he also invites you to be part of his team! That's what Peter learned in today's story and that is a lesson for us as well. No matter what has happened, no matter how down you are, Jesus lifts you up, restores your relationship with God, and then invites you to be part of his resurrection team. "Feed my sheep," he says.

Jesus was teaching Peter and also us what it means to be part of the Body of Christ - which is another way to talk about being part of his team. We are Christ's Body and that means we are a team and so we work together and care for one another. "Feed my sheep. Feed my lambs," said Jesus. Care for those around you. Those who eat bread with you at the Lord's Table. Those who sit in the pews with you. Those who are your neighbors. Those who live across town or across the ocean. Those who hurting. Those who are down. Those who need to be lifted up. Those who need to know they are loved. Like you are loved. Feed them. "Feed my sheep," says Jesus.

This is what we do after we are forgiven. This is what the Body of Christ does! This is what Christ's resurrection team does! And this is one of the ways the resurrection of Jesus makes a real difference in the lives of people!