

*Third Sunday Of Easter*  
April 18, 2010  
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

John 21:15-19

*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!" (NIV)*

Have you ever disappointed someone? I mean have you ever blown it and let a person down in a big way? Can you remember a time you made a poor decision which hurt someone? Ever fail someone badly? Even worse have you ever done this to someone very close to you? Did you let down or hurt someone who has been good and loving to you? Did you ever disappoint someone you truly love and wish you could take it back?

These disciples out fishing on the Sea of Galilee on this early morning had recently done exactly this. They let someone down big time. They blew it. They failed someone badly in his hour of need. They disappointed their friend in a big way. This friend was Jesus who was closer to them than anyone. They scattered, ran away, turned their backs on the one they called Lord and Master - the One who had loved and chosen and protected and taught and cared for them. While this is true of all of them, this morning we focus on this one disciple who had really disappointed his Savior - Peter.

But as we look at this wonderful exchange between Peter and Jesus our focus quickly turns not to Peter's love, but to Jesus' love. For Jesus comes to forgive and encourage. Jesus comes to see and strengthen. Jesus comes to repair and restore His wounded disciple. So this morning I pray the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to witness that: **Jesus' Love Never Disappoints.**

For forty days after His resurrection Jesus gives many convincing proofs to His disciples that He is alive. This is the third time John tells us that Jesus appears to His disciples. Jesus comes for this third time to comfort and console these disciples again with a message of His peace and love for them. Jesus joins these fishermen whom He would soon send out into the world as fishers of men. He gathers with them for an unforgettable breakfast.

Then we read how Jesus turns His attention to Peter. At this point a little review might be helpful in understanding this conversation between Jesus and Peter. After all, recall what Peter had said, and remember what Peter had done. Peter had assured Jesus that he had His back. Peter promised that Jesus could depend on him, even if meant

Peter's own life. When Jesus started talking about betrayal, and suffering many things, and being killed, when Jesus warned Peter that he would disown Him, Peter basically said: "No way, bring it on! Even if everyone else fails, I am ready to do whatever it takes for you Jesus." Listen to Peter in his own words: "**Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will....Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you**" (Matthew 26).

That is what Peter boldly said, but remember what Peter actually did. In the Garden after Jesus reprimanded Peter for swinging his sword wildly, Peter like the rest deserted Jesus and fled. Then in a courtyard, warming himself while Jesus was on trial, a servant girl thought she recognized Peter as one who was with Jesus. "**But he denied it before them all. 'I don't know what you're talking about.'**" When another girl saw him and said to the people that he was Jesus' disciple, Peter denied it again this time with an oath, swearing "**I don't know the man!**" A little while later when others said the same thing, and pointed out his accent, for a third time Peter denied. "**Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, 'I don't know the man!'**" At that point a rooster crowed, and Jesus, who most likely was being taken from one trial to another, turned and looked at Peter. Peter blew it. He let down his Lord. He disowned the One who loved Him even more than his own mother. I always imagine the look Jesus gave to Peter as a look of sad disappointment. And Peter went away and wept bitterly.

Now, days, even weeks, had passed as Jesus is gathered here for a breakfast with His disciples. "**When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?'**" In the Greek there are different words for love, and the one Jesus uses here is the word *agape*. *Agape* is an unconditional, selfless, and self-sacrificing kind of love. Jesus asks if Peter loves Him with this kind of love more than these. "**Do you really love me more than these,**"? Jesus asks. We see a changed disciple in Peter's answer: "**Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."** Humbly Peter tells his Lord Jesus He knows and can see his heart. But Peter uses a different Greek word for love - *phileo*. *Phileo* describes a brotherly kind of love - a friendship. Peter no longer promises a self-sacrificing love, he no longer compares himself to others, he no longer makes bold predictions. Instead, Peter tells the Lord: "**Of course, you know I love you as a dear and trusted friend.**"

Then a second time, "**Again Jesus said, 'Simon son of John, do you truly love me?'**" Jesus drops the "**more than these**" but again uses the word *agape*. Peter, using *phileo* for love, answers again: "**Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.**" But Jesus was still not done and "**the third time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?'**" Jesus asks this three times paralleling Peter's three denials. But this time Jesus changes the word He uses for love to *phileo*. As if to say: "**Okay, Peter if you are not ready to love me with a selfless, sacrificial love, are you willing to love me as a friend as you say.**" "**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.**" Peter is hurt and again now with even greater earnestness tells the Lord to look into his heart and see. Jesus knows all and certainly Jesus can see the truth. Peter loves Jesus.

What is Jesus doing here? Is Jesus just trying to make Peter feel bad? Is Jesus telling Peter He can no longer trust him and his love for Him so Peter is not going to be able to work for Jesus since he denied Him. Not at all! It was just the opposite. In love, Jesus is calling Peter to repentance. He is helping Peter to get rid of his self-confidence

and self trust. He was teaching Peter once more not to elevate himself above others. Because Jesus wants Peter to rely on Him. Jesus wants Peter to put all His trust in Him as the Savior who willingly did everything exactly as He said. Jesus gave up His life for Peter. Jesus suffered and bled on the cross for him and his sin. Jesus died for him. Jesus came out of the grave alive to assure Peter that life and forgiveness are free gifts for him, and heaven is his sure possession.

Jesus wants Peter to look away from Himself and his own love, and to look to His Savior and Jesus' love - a perfect, selfless, truly self-sacrificing love. Jesus wants Peter to turn away from his own boasts and to rely on Jesus' Word. Jesus not only forgives and restores Peter to faith, but in love Jesus has important work for this apostle Peter. Jesus makes Peter one of the leaders in His Church. He wants Peter to keep feeding and protecting Jesus' flock. Peter will be a shepherd who will now take the message of Jesus' love and forgiveness to the people. He will feed them with the good news. Peter will teach them not about his own love and accomplishments but of Jesus' love - a love that never disappoints.

Does not Jesus deal with you and me in the same loving way? How have you disappointed Jesus recently? Has it been with a not so faithful worship life or not so active reading and studying of His Word? Like Peter, have we had opportunities to stand up for Jesus and confess our faith, but instead denied and disowned Jesus in the face of pressure? Which commandment of God have we trampled all over lately? How many times have we foolishly looked to our own strength and self-confidence in dealing with our problems? Can we see Jesus' face glancing at us with a sad disappointed look? We should because we have truly let Him down. We have blown it again and again. We deserve a Jesus who comes in wrath and anger to cast us sinners out of His presence forever. But that is not what Jesus did to Peter. And may we drop to our knees in thanks, knowing that is not what Jesus does to us. In love, Jesus calls us to repentance. He restores us by pointing us to His cross and empty tomb. He comes to us in love again and again to forgive and encourage - to see and strengthen. He comes to repair us and ready us to serve.

That's what Jesus' love did for Peter. It made Peter willing and more than ready to serve. In fact, now Jesus knows Peter would be willing to give up his own life for Jesus. Jesus says to Peter: ***"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!"*** Tradition has it that Peter was martyred by being crucified on an upside down cross for following Jesus. ***"Yes, Lord you know all things; you can see that Peter loves you!"***

I pray that Jesus looks into our hearts and sees the same. But if we fix our eyes on ourselves and our love for Jesus we may not always like what we see, because our love too often wavers, our love too often comes up far short of *agape*, our love too often disappoints. That's why we need to keep our eyes focused on Jesus and His love - that is a love that never disappoints - a love that bled and died so we could be His own - a love that will carry us through this life and into eternal life. How can we do anything else, but, like Peter, follow Jesus! Amen.