

In Jesus' name. Amen.

As follows in Jesus' name:

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs." He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" and he said to Him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." (This He said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this He said to him, "Follow Me."

Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against Him during the supper and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray You?" When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If it is My will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!" So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, "If it is My will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?"

This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true. Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. ^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

People Loved by God,

We continue the story from last week, when we heard about Peter and 7 other disciples going fishing.

From the shore, Jesus called out and, just like 3 years before when Jesus called Peter to be a disciple,

He told the professional fishermen where to throw their nets for a catch of fish.

And just like 3 yrs before, they had caught nothing all night, upon His Word, they caught a great catch.

So now, they have had their fish breakfast with the risen Savior

and Jesus turns now to an important matter - the restoration of one of His sheep.

Jesus then begins to ask Peter the same question 3 times.

But that first question Jesus asked Peter was not simply a question of, "Do you love Me?"

Remember, Jesus asked, "**Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?**"

It's those last 3 words that would sting Peter's conscience.

Just a few weeks before, on a very emotionally intense night, Peter had boasted:

"If all of these fall away [speaking of the other 10 disciples], I never will."

It was his way of boasting that he loved Jesus more than the other disciples.

But now, after his fall, after his denial of Jesus, he realized the weakness of his love.

How could he boast of this now?

And so he humbly answers: "**Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.**"

Only, he doesn't use the same word for love as Jesus does.

Where Jesus asked Peter, do you love me with a self-sacrificing love, *agape* love,
Peter would only confess to being able to love Him with a brotherly love, *phileo* love.

He could not boast a self-sacrificing love when he had denied Jesus in order to save his own life...
even with curses.

And here we see the great love of Jesus for His disciple.

You know that those words spoken that fateful night, those curses Peter called down on himself,
would plague Peter's conscience and cause him to wonder if God would hold him to his word
and those curses would come true....

In the quiet of the night, when your conscience becomes active as you reflect on your day...
when the other disciples are reliving that historic night...

when the devil is simply wanting to cause him fear or doubt...

that is when Peter would need this conversation.

Yes, he would still have moments where it wasn't forefront on his mind, like

when he excitedly tried to convince Thomas, along with the other disciples, about Jesus' resurrection...

or when he joyfully jumped out of the boat to be the first one to be with Jesus that morning...

But so long as those thoughts weren't dealt with, he would not find comfort or peace.

Of course, that doesn't mean that this conversation was easy.

We hear that at the third time Jesus asked him if he loved Him, Peter was **grieved** by the 3 questions.

Did he see a connection: 3 denials, 3 "Do you love Me?"s.

But it was through this difficult conversation, that Peter learns of the fullness of the Lord's forgiveness.

After each statement of Peter, "**Lord, You know that I love you,**"

and each realization that *his* love was not a perfect love, as Jesus' love was for him,

Jesus once again called him not just to be a **fisher of men**, but to be a shepherd of them;

to "**Feed My lambs,**" "**Tend My sheep,**" and "**Feed My sheep.**"

The Lord did not let him try to repress the sin or hide it ...

or wonder if God was going to ignore it or bring it up later...

or worry that God was going to punish him at a future time.

And then Jesus tells him simply, "**Follow Me.**"

...

Now, in those quiet moments of the night, rather than dread of God's wrath,

his conscience could be quieted and at ease, at peace with His good Shepherd.

Now, when the disciples are reminiscing about that blessed night,

he can recall it too, and his role in it, and praise the Lord for His grace and mercy.

Now, when the devil would cause him fear or doubt,

he can defiantly proclaim to the devil that through that cross, through the shedding of Jesus' blood,

he is a defeated enemy and his accusations about that sin have been answered by God Himself.

People loved by God,

Do you see how it was not Peter's love for Jesus, but Jesus' love for Peter that comforted him?

Not only His love in dying for his sins, but also His love in telling him about it.

He is still doing that. He still shows His love to His people by showing Jesus' death as their atonement
and by sending His ministers, His shepherds to them to feed and tend them with His Word.

But so that you do not put these ministers up on a pedestal on account of their own piety or life, realize that pastors are the same as Peter; they are sinners, too.

The black that they wear in their uniform and in their vestments is a reminder to them and you of this truth.

And so they live by the same Word that they preach, by the same forgiveness, washed in the same baptism, and fed by the same body and blood that you do.

And so the white that covers the black in their vestments, is also a reminder of the robe of Jesus' righteousness that covers over our sin.

and the white at their throat or around their collar a reminder of the Gospel of Jesus that they preach, that covers over your sin.

So it is not their love for the Savior that should impress you, but the Savior's love for you, His people.

And just as Peter was the recipient of the Lord's forgiveness and grace,

and just as His ministers have been recipients of that same forgiveness and grace,

so the Lord has called them to be distributors of that same forgiveness and grace on His behalf, by His command and by His authority.

Perhaps most frequently, in the Christian Church, this is done in the general assembly by the public confession and absolution at the beginning of the divine service.

There you confess your sins and your Savior, and there "by the authority of God and [this] holy office" the pastor declares "*the gracious forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*" ELH p.

And you are to believe that *forgiveness as from God Himself, and in no way doubt but firmly believe that all your sins are thereby forgiven before God in heaven,*^(SC: What is Confession?)

for these words are not the pastor's words but the Lord's Word.

But there are also times where more tending and feeding are needed.

Such as times when offense has been given or taken.

And just as Jesus came to Peter for the purpose of relieving his conscience, so the Lord sends His shepherds for the same purpose.

Where a sin is uncovered, it is not for the purpose of saying "gotcha" or exposing one to ridicule, nor is it brought about by animus or hatred, but as Christ admonishes, "**to win a brother over,**"^{Mt.18} that such a one might be free from guilt, fear, doubt, and eternal death, and rather live... at peace with God and man, unafraid and with a clear conscience.

Or where self-examination has already revealed a sin and its guilt is felt...

or where doubt of salvation exists... or the devil plaques and accuses you,

you may go to your shepherd for private confession and absolution...

you may seek spiritual counsel and aid..or request his private prayers...

or you may simply ask to hear God's Word applied to you in your trials, fears, and need.

And it is his joy and delight to speak the Lord's words of comfort and peace, just as he himself has received it from the Lord,

so that you may know and believe that in Christ Jesus, baptized into His death and resurrection, the Lord does not hold you to your words, or your thoughts, or your actions,

but holds Himself to His Word, to the Word of Jesus, "Depart in peace, your sins are forgiven."

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria