



The Next Morning

Prayer:

“Almighty God to whom all hearts are open and from whom no secrets are hid, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may worthily praise you and serve you through Christ our Lord. Amen”

Text:

John 21:1-19

Philippians 2:1-7, 12-18

In John’s gospel there is a fascinating after-Easter story. Peter, Thomas, Nathanael and the brothers James and John are back home in Galilee. Jesus has risen. They had seen Him in the upper room. What is it that they do? They go fishing. In fact, they are out there all night returning to what, I am sure, was something they found familiar and comfortable.

But while they are out, feeling what had to be for them a sense of peace and escape, something unbelievable happens – Jesus returns and begins to make them breakfast. Yes, you read correctly, our Lord Jesus was frying fish. Same lake, same beach, same fish, same fishermen. Had nothing changed in the midst of a reality that indicated everything had changed? At quick glance one might think so, and yet the truth is that even though that beach, a night of fishing, and our Lord cooking was probably familiar, these men would never look at life the same way again. These men were seeing and hearing in a new way. Their understanding had changed. I think Jesus’ conversation with Peter after breakfast is a huge indication of that reality.

The text tells us that Jesus takes Peter aside; for what I believe to be one of the most moving conversations in the gospels. Jesus says to Peter, “Peter, do you love me?” Peter, the one who denied our Lord three times says, “Lord you know I love you.” Jesus responds, “Feed my sheep.” A second time Jesus turns to Peter and asks the same question, “Peter do you love me?”

Clearly Peter wasn’t having it; not because he was fed-up with the questioning, but more than likely it was due to the fact that the level of love he speaks of and the love that Jesus is looking for are two different things. But not promising more than he can deliver, Peter simply says, “Lord, I love you.” Jesus responds, “Feed my lambs.”

Still not done, Jesus asks the question a third time, “Peter, do you love me?” “Lord, you know I love you!” Jesus might have wished for more. Yet the reality is He took Peter where he was, demanding no more, but taking him on his own terms. “Feed my sheep”, He said once more.

What the text doesn't clearly indicate in its English translation is this. In Greek there are many words for our English word "love." A deep and intimate friendship is *philia*, while the word that the New Testament uses for that self-giving, out-going goodwill we are asked to offer to our neighbor is *agape*. Jesus is speaking of agape while Peter is offering philia. This teacher and his student were on two different pages on what they were speaking of and referring to.

And yet the reality is, Jesus took Peter where he was at – a person like us in a world like ours. That is the wonder of what our Lord did for us. After the event of Easter, God returned to ordinary people in ordinary settings to work his will.

In the midst of our current days, I think about the reality of our Lord's presence within our lives. It is something that I hear over and over again getting questioned and even distorted. But I keep coming back to the text – to the reality of the resurrection – to the promises of a God who offers us His unconditional love time and time again. I keep coming back to what our Lord entrusted to us and trying to keep that as the focus; which is not always an easy task.

The truth is we are not the best at loving our Lord – putting him first – being mindful of his call to us – caring for those around us – welcoming the stranger – and yet our Lord meets us where we are at. In the midst of our hesitation, fear, uncertainties, and struggles. He is there reminding us of His love and its intensity. Urging us not just to receive, but to share it as well. To open our hearts as wide as they can go.

These last days I have been reminded of how much we can indeed open our hearts and it has taken my breath away at points. People have come forward to offer help, donated gift cards, checked in on people they were worried about, dropped things off to our folks who are in assisted living/nursing homes, signed up to help with Strongsville's Meals on Wheels program. I see love that I would use the word agape to describe. May that love be that which continues to guide and ground us as we continue to move forward through this unprecedented time.

Prayer:

O Lord, you have been with us through the ages. You walked with us when we wandered as strangers in the world. You liberated us when captive. You lead us out of bondage. You sent us Jesus, our Master, and Lord, that we might follow in his way and find abundant life. You have nourished us with your gifts of bread and wine. You have trusted us with His ministry in the world. In these ways you have covenanted with your people to be our God if we will but be your people. Even when we have pushed you away, forgotten or ignored you, you have continued your love for us. Knowing all of this Lord, we pray that you would forgive us our short comings, and renew your trust, that through your power we might continue to live and love as you have called us to do. Amen