

## 19/4 /2009 KK 10.30am Church Bibles 1090 John 21:15-25

I wonder why Peter went fishing? Jesus, the risen Lord, had appeared to his disciples, including Peter. The appearances were exhilarating, mind-blowing.

But between the appearances were gaps. Did Simon Peter grow impatient? He announced he was going fishing, back to his old haunts, his old boat, his old trade, his old ambition, almost as if the time spent with Jesus had been a wonderful holiday that had ended.

All night they had caught nothing, till Jesus called instructions. After a huge catch, Peter waded hurriedly ashore. Jesus invited them to "Come and have breakfast." - words we quoted last Sunday when we had breakfast before the service.

Then came a private dialogue between Jesus and Peter.

15 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."

16 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."

17 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."

18 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."

19 Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

20 Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?")

21 When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?"

22 Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me."

23 Because of this, the rumour spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?"

24 This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

25 Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

How often do you compare yourself to other people?

Does anyone privately think that in certain respects, they are better than someone else? a better golfer, a better Bridge player, a more successful businessman, a better elder? We might not say it in public. Bragging, boasting about oneself is not attractive, and should have no place in a Christian gathering. We tell ourselves, if we are conscious of it: 'Take care, pride comes before a fall.' The trouble is, when we see faults in others, and remark on them, we may not realise that we are comparing ourselves to them.

OK; thinking about ourselves as superior to others is wrong. Perhaps you think the other way round. You keep seeing others as better than you.

I did this once in a congregation where someone had a PhD. I kept deferring to his superior intellect, till he said, 'I wish you'd stop that, Phil.' I had an inferiority complex. Just as well that God began to deal with it, or I'd never have survived in a congregation with professors and millionaires.

We had a sermon on humility recently from 1 Peter 3, so we know it is an important virtue. We quoted Romans 12:3 Do not think of yourselves more highly than you ought to think, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

So do you see someone in a bigger house than you, and think they are more important than you? If a friend has a university degree and you do not, do you deduce they are more intelligent than you, or more likely to understand the Bible? It ain't necessarily so.

True, humility is better than pride, but my concern is that any kind of comparing ourselves to others is an unhealthy attitude.

At the last supper, Jesus had warned the disciples they would all fall away on account of him.

Peter replied, 'Even if *all* fall away on account of you, I never will.

'I tell you the truth,' Jesus answered, 'this very night, before the cock crows, you will disown me three times.'

Peter thought he knew better - knew himself, and his fellow disciples; and that he'd be better at holding out under pressure:

'Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.'

But as he stood in the courtyard of the High Priest's house, that is exactly what Peter did do.

So Peter's big mouth and big head got him into trouble at the Supper, and in the High priest's courtyard. Now, at the lakeshore, Jesus wanted to deal with that.

I wonder if any of us need the master's gentle treatment too? Have you in effect denied Jesus? Let him down so badly that you suspect he has no time for you? For you to be even asking that question tells me his Spirit is at work in your heart, drawing you back to the Saviour who loves you.

This meeting was a deeply personal encounter. Do you need a dialogue with Jesus like this?

CS Lewis echoes this event in 'The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe,' when he describes the private walk Edmund has with Aslan.

We all need that private word, to sort out our wrongs, and be reconnected for service. Let's see what happened, and see if Peter learnt his lesson.

John 21:15-19 Three times Jesus asks the question, Do you love me; Peter choked up at the third time, so at the very least, he heard an echo of his triple denial. Notice, in each of the three questions:

a) Jesus addresses him as 'Simon, son of John' (not 'Peter', the extra name Jesus had given.)

b) Jesus asks 'Do you love me?' raises three issues

(i) change in Greek verb for 'love'

(ii) do you love me 'more than these'?

- (iii) Feed/take care/feed my lambs/sheep/sheep  
c) Peter's future - and John's.

Let's take the three separately:

a) Jesus addresses him as 'Simon, son of John'.

When Jesus had given him the new name, it was immediately following Peter's confession that Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God.

That was the rock on which the Christian church was built.

You are Petros, and on this petra I will build my church.

No pun on 'Rock' here, though we could have in English said his stand was decidedly *rocky*!

There is strength to help others only as we are in touch with Jesus, our one true king and head.

b) three times Jesus questions Simon, do you love me, and this raises three issues:

(i) Do you love me...?

In English, we have a wide range of words to describe our relationship with someone: I know him or her, I *admire* him, I *like* him, I am *fond* of him, I *love* him, I *adore* him.

In our Greek NT, Jesus apparently uses two different words for love, *agapao* and *phileo*. The NIV has tried to reflect this by using 'truly love' for the first two questions; each time, Peter's reply uses *phileo*, translated in NIV: 'I love you,'

Do you truly love me more than these? Yes, I love you.      Feed my lambs

Do you truly love me?      I love you.      Take care of my sheep

Do you love me?      Peter hurt; Lord you know all things; you know that I love you.  
Feed my sheep.

So after Peter has twice replied using the more restrained response (*phileo*) Jesus echoes Peter's choice of word, Do you love me (*phileo*) (i.e. if you don't truly love me (*agapao*), do you even love me? (*phileo*)?)

The trouble is, Jesus spoke not in Greek, but in Aramaic, which does not have that range of verbs for love. Could John be conveying in Greek something that Jesus conveyed by tone of voice?

Possible solution: John uses a lot of synonyms in his Gospel, not least in these verses. Different words for 'know' in Peter's sentence at the end of v17c Lord you *know* all things; you *know* that I love you.

'Feed' and 'care for' and 'lambs' and 'sheep'.

(ii) *more than these?* The word 'these' is not defined.

Do you love me...

a) more than the tools for fishing? boat, nets, way of life?

b) more than you love your fellow disciples?

c) more than your fellow disciples love me?

Huge challenge

a) For some people, having tools for a trade is not merely a matter of convenience; the tools themselves provide a sense of security. If that was Peter's problem, reliance on material things to obtain his daily bread, John 21:15-25, he needed to love Jesus more

than *things*. Do you value an object more highly than Jesus? A car, a house, a locality, a camera, a set of golf clubs, a membership of the golf club itself? Are they more important to you than knowing and loving Jesus himself?

b) or is Jesus asking: Do you love me more than you love these people, your fellow disciples?

for some people, a love for a person - spouse, parent, child - is so overwhelming that it over-rides our relationship with Christ.

No-one likes the pain of bereavement, and in truth the pain is a sign that we have felt love for the one we have lost. But bereavement can teach us to love the other person *under God*. To realise that only God is permanent; all humans are transient; their life on earth is finite.

Only when we and they love God, as servants who have found forgiveness through the death of Christ, will we one day be reunited in heaven, where we and they will be engrossed in the deeper love of God. I find it distressing when people say words like, 'Ah well, now gran is with granddad. They'll be happy again.' If our desire for heaven is to be reunited with others who have died, I fear we love the people more than we love the Lord. That is not a sure recipe for access to heaven.

c) do you love me more than these disciples love me? That was what Peter had been bragging in the Upper room. Follow me, feed/tend my sheep/lambs i.e. NOT back to day job of fishing.

**How love Jesus?** Time with him, listening to Him speak to us in the Bible. Time with him, in adoration and confession. Finding his will in the Bible and doing it,

Meaning of feed / care for. Who are the sheep?

Fellow believers in Jesus as the Christ.

The flock = the church

How do pastors feed sheep? Unravel the Bible, linking it to the hungers, the actual needs of the people. If we let them, our children would indulge in chocolate, crisps, chips and ginger. We have to feed them proteins and starch, vitamins and fibre, until they learn to choose well for themselves.

When you look for a new minister, be sure you look for one who knows the importance of feeding the flock.

If people come to church to be entertained, they will drop off when the jokes dry up or the music goes flat or the children make a noise...

Jesus promised blessing to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Did you come looking for these today?

Do you thirst for God like the deer in flight, like Marathon runners on a hot day?

Does the content in KK allow you to meet God, adore him, absorb his Word, and equip you to do his will?

vv20-24 Jesus words to Peter that began, Do you love me? ended: 'Follow me!'

When Duncan Campbell was asked to come to the Isle of Lewis to help preach during the revival of 1951, the minister went down to the pier with an elder, to greet him. On being introduced, Campbell put out his hand to shake, but the elder kept his behind his back. 'Do you love the lord?' he asked.

Campbell replied, 'I do my best to serve him.'

'That'll dae, laddie, that'll dae.' And shook his hand.

**So, did Peter learn his lesson?** Did he stop comparing himself with other disciples?

Peter wanted to know, v21: '*what about him?*' i.e John, the disciple whom Jesus loved,

the one that had leant up close to him when they were reclining at table during the last supper

Uh-uh, Peter is back at the comparison game.

Temptation to compare ourselves with others. Peter's boast at the last supper he would not deny Jesus even if all the others did, prompted Jesus to draw out the fact that Peter still had this kind of wrong-thinking in his subconscious.

Comparisons may arise out of jealousy at others' seeming success; "I wish I were as good looking, as good at maths, as good at making money, as humble/ loving..."

Oh, I know sport and games are competitive, for that enables us to excel, to improve on our previous Personal Best. But sportsmen and women end a contest by shaking hands with their competitors as equals. Faster at running is not necessarily better as a person

The comparative attitude can be in a self-deprecating way: He or she is so good and I am just average, or outright poor; well, maybe so in comparison to another person. The aim is to lose sight of our self worth in our own eyes, and accept the worth the God gives us. He thinks we are precious enough to die for. We matter to God, hugely. Who needs to be compared to another Christian, when our Saviour is so much better than all of us?

Listen, Jesus had to tell Peter, to stop it: Stop asking about my plan for *his* life; what matters is my plan for *your* life, and whether you are going to follow it.

*[ Philippians 2 :3-4 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

*5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus...who humbled himself*

*Well, Peter found out things about his own life and future: v18 '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!'