
"Do you love me?" What is your response?

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The Cathedral of St. Philip
Atlanta, Georgia
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7:45 A.M. & 9:00 A.M.
The Third Sunday of Easter - Year C
John 21:1-19

North of Jerusalem, on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee is the sea of Tiberius. This shore is just as accessible today as it was for the Disciples of Christ who fished there over two thousand years ago.

It looks like any other body of water that is not an ocean except that we are told by our leader and Chaplain Lois, our spiritual leader that when the sea rises it comes up past the shoreline and water surrounds the church which stands there today. When the water is high, it floods to the point that pilgrims such as ourselves cannot wade into the very sea in which we just heard about in our gospel today. The Sea of Tiberius.

On the Sea of Tiberius, Simon Peter, Nathanael, Thomas, the sons of Zebedee and two other disciples were together. They did what was normal for them. They went fishing. Jesus had left them. They were not sure about their future so they turned to an activity which was normal for them. They fished.

Even though Jesus had appeared to them for a third time, they did not know it. They did not know who he was.

So they did what was normal for them. They went fishing. They were guided by the one that they had followed. They were told by Jesus where to fish and they did so and were successful, but they did not recognize him.

They did not know that the one guiding them was the one that they had followed before.

As Esther, a cathedral member and a fellow pilgrim on this journey in Jerusalem read the passage of scripture that you and I just heard a priest also a fellow pilgrim came forward to give a homily on the spot where we sat with the church on the shore in close view. As he began his homily, we were reminded of Jesus preparing breakfast for his disciples.

When Jesus prepared breakfast for his disciples, bringing into focus his appearance to them for the third time and they did not recognize him, we pilgrims were reminded then as you and I are reminded this morning of three possibilities. Those three possibilities are simple, they are not new and the message is the same for us today as it was for the Thomas, who doubted, Nathanael, Simon Peter, the sons of Zebedee and two other disciples who are not named.

Jesus revealed himself to them. It was more than just seeing him, however.

Simon Peter possessed the most spiritual discernment. He was the one who leaned on Jesus' breast in the artist depiction of the last meal.

Today we are to continue our work just as the disciples were reminded to continue their work.

We don't have to go all the way to the Sea of Tiberius to be reminded of what Jesus said to Simon Peter. During this season of Eastertide the message is the same.

First, he asks Simon Peter if he loved him more than these. And the response was, "Lord, you know that I love you more than these." Then he was told, well if that is true, then "feed my lambs." He then asked Simon Peter a second time, "Do you love me?" And Simon Peter responded, "Yes Lord, you know that I love you." The response was "tend my sheep."

A third time Simon Peter was asked the same question and Simon Peter had hurt feelings because he was asked for the third time, "Do you love me?" He felt that God knew how he believed in his heart. Even though God did know, Simon Peter was asked. Jesus wanted to hear the words. Not because of what Simon Peter had said, but because of Simon Peter's inaction toward doing what he had been asked and called to do. Thusly, he asked him for a third time and the response from Simon Peter was "Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you." And the response was "feed my sheep."

As we, the pilgrims, sat under the permanent cover provided to protect us from the weather in the event of it being inclement, were asked by the priest who was a fellow pilgrim, this question. What is your response today to God? Do you love God? If so, how are you following the example of feeding Gods' people who are hungry? We were asked, "Do you love God?"

If so, how are you ensuring that my people who are also those who are poor in spirit being tended to, as I asked you to do? And the third question that we were asked as we sat in comfort looking at the sea of Tiberius with money in our bank accounts, and thoughts of buying souvenirs for our family and friends and dreaming of the place that we were going to next to have a special lunch prepared for us with authentic food of the Mediterranean, "do you love God?" For third time and if so, how are you giving thanks for the grace that is abundant in your life? Yes, God knows our all, but it is good to respond to the call upon our lives just as Simon Peter did. He dedicated his life and lived as a follower of God, in everything that he did.

Simon Peter loved God without hesitation and God knew it. Does God know your heart and what you truly believe and believe in?

Are we serving only ourselves or are we earnestly serving others?

Our work today is still the same as Simon Peter's.

People want to see Jesus and not us.

They want to see Jesus in our ministries, in our work, in our lives, in our words and deeds.

Jesus told his disciples, "Whoever serves me must follow me: and where I am, my servant will also be."

Where are you today? Who are you serving?

Amen.

Comments? Contact The Rev. Carolynne Williams: cwilliams@stphilipscathedral.org