

“Breakfast at the Shore”

John 21:15-19



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Dr. Paul T. Eckel

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What is it they say? ‘Wherever two or three Christians are gathered together, there a chicken will die!’

Christians have always eaten together. Even after his resurrection Christ ate with his disciples – those two on the Emmaus road, there in the upper room, and now with ‘Breakfast at the Shore.’

Last Sunday we were dealing with some of our Lord’s resurrection appearances to named individuals. Peter was one of those. Today, let’s explore a bit more thoroughly the conversation Jesus had with Peter by the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

The Context

Over the years Jan and I have led many Pilgrimages to the Holy Land. We know this shoreline well. The beautiful Sea of Galilee is still fished from shore and boats by fishermen who use throwing nets.

Picture the scene for yourself. It’s early morning. A small fire is burning on a rock-strewn beach and the resurrected Lord is the cook. After all have eaten their fill, a conversation begins between Jesus and Peter.

When considering the text of such a conversation, it is wise to review the context. Start with the personal side. Peter was the ‘out front’ disciple. He was the first to identify Jesus as the Messiah, the first to claim total loyalty to Jesus and the first to vow even to die for Jesus.

But, you remember, when cornered and frightened Peter waffled. It happened around another campfire in the High Priest’s courtyard. As he warmed himself, Peter swore not once, not twice – *three times* that he did not know Jesus! The rooster crowed and guilt overwhelmed.



A second important context for this conversation is literary. In our Scripture this morning you heard the word ‘love’ used seven times – Jesus asking, “Do you love me” and Peter answering, “Yes, I love you.” It’s helpful to note that two different Greek words for ‘love’ are used here.

- The first is the word *agape*, which means the sort of love God has for us, and the sort of love we are to show to God and others.
- The second is the word *phileo*, which means the affection friends enjoy together. It describes the fondness each has for the other.

To be fair, some scholars hold that these two different words for ‘love’ are inconsequential in understanding the conversation John reports. In my view nothing is inconsequential in John’s Gospel. He has chosen all his words carefully and expects the readers of his Gospel to reflect with equal care upon their meanings.

These two Greek words for ‘love’ are used separately throughout the New Testament. But only here in verses 15 and 16 of John 21 are these two words for ‘love’ ever found together in the same verse and, in fact, in two successive verses!

Archbishop William Temple may have put it best when he said, “It is not reasonably conceivable that these two different words should be used together merely to convey the same meaning.”

What’s unsettling is that this passage about ‘love’ keeps drawing each of us uncomfortably into the middle of the conversation.

The Conversation

When the disciples finished eating, Jesus asked Peter, “*Do you love me, more than these?*” For Peter that must have brought to mind his earlier bravado, “*though all become deserters, I will not*” (Mk. 14:29). Even so, he caved.

What was Jesus' question? Not, do you *believe* in me, or *serve* me. Jesus asked, "*Do you love me*" – do you *agape* me with a godly love?

Peter said, "*Lord, you know that I love you.*" His exact word was, 'I *phileo* you,' that is, you are my friend. Who after all can measure up to Christ love? Peter set the bar for himself at a human height.

That's where we all set it! We can't begin to span the gulf between Christ's eternal and sacrificial love for us and our anemic and pedestrian fondness for Him. By God's grace alone, we who fall so short of God's love are nonetheless given God's work to do. "*Feed my lambs.*"



An awkward silence probably fell over the disciples as Jesus spoke again revisiting the same subject. Peter, probably wanted to change the subject. We usually do when things get too close. But Jesus won't let it go. "*Simon...do you love me*" – do you *agape* me?

For Jesus everything begins with loving him. Your personal relationship with Christ is the taproot of Christian faith. 'Peter, do you *love* me that way – personally and intimately?'

'Well, Lord,' we can almost hear Peter stammer, 'not exactly *that* way, but "*You know that I love you*" [I *phileo* you]. You are my dear friend, Jesus, and I am deeply fond of you.' That's as far as Peter could go.

Amazingly, Jesus is willing to start with this – our little baby steps. But be forewarned, our Lord may be easy to please, but he is hard to satisfy. With that proviso He sends us to our task, "*Tend my sheep.*"



Peter must have hoped this painful conversational ordeal was at an end. Twice around was enough. What else could he say? Yet the cleansing of Peter's soul and the spiritual renewal of his life was not yet complete.

Now for the third time Jesus poses the same question. But this time He adopts Peter's own lesser term for 'love.' No longer does Jesus⁵

inquire do you *agape* me. Now He asks Peter, ‘Am I even your friend? Are you even fond of me?’

There’s an edge to Jesus’ question and many of us feel the cut. We, too, have sincerely said ‘Yes’ to Jesus, but have often drifted thereafter into nibbling a little bit now and then around the back edges of faith.

Christ picks up on our tentativeness and asks, ‘Is even your modest commitment to Me true? If I really were your friend, wouldn’t you want to spend more time with me? Wouldn’t a friend of mine want to experience the deeper love for which I gave my life?’

The Communion

With this question ringing in our ears, we find ourselves gathering again around the Communion Table. Here more than any other place and time we can feel – yes, even taste! – Christ’s love for us in flesh and blood.

So today, during your quiet moments with bread and wine hold your own conversation with Jesus. And like countless other believers before you, ask Him – the One who loved-you-to-death! – to help you love Him more.

*More love to Thee, O Christ, More love to thee!
Hear Thou the prayer I make on bended knee.
This is my earnest plea: More love, O Christ to Thee:
More love to Thee, More love to Thee!*



Church of the Palms

3224 Bee Ridge Road
Sarasota, Florida 34239
(941) 924-1323
www.churchofthepalms.org