

The Third Sunday of Easter

Text: John 21:15-19 (NIV)

¹⁵When 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.” ¹⁶Again 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.” ¹⁷The 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. ¹⁸I 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.” ¹⁹Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!”

Theme: The Kind of People whom Christ Chooses

I have been your pastor for over 13 years. Those of you who have been members that whole time have hopefully noticed that I am not perfect. In fact, you have probably a lot of ways in which I am not the perfect pastor. If you ask my wife, she could probably think of even more things. I’m sure that my kids would find still more. I am sure that I would be able to add even more things to the list.

When we all look at our lives as Christians, we realize that none of us are perfect. We all have our faults, but that is the kind of people whom Christ chooses to follow Him.

I. The people whom Christ chooses are not worthy.

Think of both the Apostle Paul in our first lesson and Peter in this lesson. In 1 Timothy 1:13 Paul writes, “*I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man.*” When Stephen was stoned, Paul didn’t throw any of the rocks, but he watched the coats of those who did, and he approved of what they did. (Acts 7:58;8:1) Then Saul began to go from place to place to have Christians arrested. The church feared him. In our first lesson today he was on his way to Damascus to find Christians when Christ appeared to him and asked, “*Saul, Saul why do you persecute Me?*”

Peter was able to talk a good game. At the Last Supper he told Jesus, “*Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.*” When the Lord was arrested, Peter drew his sword and cut off the ear of the servant of the High Priest, but when Jesus said, “No more of this!” Peter ran. When he came back to find his Lord, he denied Him three times, even to a young servant girl, and with curses. When it came down to it, Peter was a coward. He would rather save his own neck than follow Jesus to His cross.

Think of the times when we have failed our Lord. Have there been times when we have been too timid about our faith? Have there been times when our behavior was not very Christ-like at all? Could we say that we have been violent like Paul or that we were cowards like Peter? When we all examine our lives and see our weaknesses and failings, we must confess, “I am not worthy Lord. Why would you want me?”

II. God only desires one thing from us. That is our love.

Think of His great love for us. We confess that every Sunday in the creed. He took our flesh upon Himself. He was born of the Virgin Mary and laid in a manger. He suffered under Pontius Pilate. He was crucified, dead, and buried in a tomb. Every one of those deeds showed His great love for you. There is no one who has ever loved you like Jesus did. He gave up all of His glory to take your sin and shame.

The question is what do you say to that? One of the worst feelings in the world is when you love someone, and they don't show any love in return. The husband or wife plans something very special for their spouse, and they could care less. A child makes a special project for a parent or has some exciting news, and no one cares. That is how it is for Jesus when we spurn His love for us. He gave His life for us. All that He wants in return is our love. So He asked Peter, "Do you love me?" After all that Peter had been through, all that Jesus wanted to know was whether he still loved his Lord. So Peter answered, "*You know that I love You.*"

This exchange between Peter and Jesus is very interesting in the Greek.. It has to do with two of the Greek words for love, which are agape and phileo. Jesus asked him, "***Simon, son of John, do you agape Me more than these do?***" Agape is the word for a sacrificial love. Peter's answer was, "***Lord, you know that I phileo you.***" Phileo is the word for a brotherly love. It is our affection for those whom we like. Basically, the Lord asks Peter, "***Do you love Me with a greater sacrificial love than all of these do?***" Peter answered, "***You know that You are dear to me.***" Peter had learned something about pride. Jesus was asking whether Peter loved Him more than the others did. Peter had learned not to think too highly of himself. He simply answered that the Lord was dear to him. The second time Jesus also said, "***Do you agape Me?***" Peter answered again, "***Yes, Lord I phileo You.***" But the third time Jesus asked, "***Do you phileo Me?***" Peter said, "***You know all things. You know that I phileo you.***"

As Christians we realize that our love for Christ will never be perfect in this world. Like Peter we all have to confess that our love for the Lord has failed, and it will fail in the future. We know that we are weak and vulnerable, but Christ is our strength. His love for us doesn't fail, even when our love for Him does. Luke writes in his Gospel that when Peter denied his Lord, the Lord was looking right at him. I believe that it was the look of compassion. Peter ran out and wept because he really did love Jesus as his Savior. Now, just as Peter denied Jesus three times, the Lord gave him the chance to reaffirm his love for the Lord three times. He realizes that he did not have a perfect love as Jesus had for him, but he really did love Christ and trusted in Christ's forgiveness for Him. When we sin, the Lord also looks at us with compassion and mercy. He desires that we also trust in His forgiveness, and simply reaffirm, that although we are not perfect yet, we love Him as our dear Savior.

III. Christ calls imperfect people like us to have a part in His work.

Compare who we are with who He is. He is the "King of Kings and Lord of Lords." He is "*God over all, forever praised.*" "*In Him all the fulness of the deity dwells in bodily form.*" He has risen from the dead and ascended into heaven "*far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age, but also in the one to come.*" (Eph 1:21ff) Who

are we in comparison to that? We are weak. We are sinful. We are mortal. How could Christ ever use people like us?

Yet, He bids us to have a part in His work. Three times Jesus told Peter, “*Feed my lambs.*” This man who was so afraid in the courtyard of the high priest, would preach a sermon on Pentecost in which 3,000 people would come to faith. A short time later he would be arrested and told not to preach about Jesus anymore, but he answered, “*We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.*” (Acts 4:20) Peter would preach the Gospel and build our Lord’s church until he would be led to a cross and crucified as Jesus was, with one exception. Tradition says that he did not count himself worthy to die as Jesus did, and he asked that his cross be turned upside down. Christ also told Paul that he would be the Lord’s instrument to take the Gospel to the Gentiles. We all know how the Gospel spread into many new places through his work.

The Lord has given each one of us gifts for the tasks that He has given to us. We don’t choose either the gifts or the tasks. Like both Peter and Paul He leads us often to places where we would rather not go. He also strengthens us to do things that we would have never dreamed of. He defends us from great trouble. He gives us courage to confess Christ when we thought that we would be afraid. He blesses us with the gifts, abilities, and joy to have a part in His work of building His church.

Think of the kinds of men, that the Lord called, when He called Paul and Peter. One was violent. The other was a coward. Yet, the Lord gave them His strength and used them to lay the foundation of His church. If God could use men like that, He can also use each of us despite our weaknesses and failings. Confess your sins to Christ, and reaffirm your love for Him, and He will strengthen you with His peace and love and make you into an important part of His Church for His glory.

Amen

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April 18, 2010***