

Peter Moments

John 21:1-19

April 18, 2010

**“Tonight you're mine completely, You give your love so sweetly,** Tonight the light of love is in your eyes, Will you love me tomorrow?” Some of you perhaps recognize these as lyrics from the classic song, “Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow.” It concludes with, “I'd like to know that your love, **Is love I can be sure of, So tell me now, cause I won't ask again,** Will you still love me tomorrow? Will you still love me tomorrow? Will you still love me tomorrow?” Similar to the questioning of Peter by the resurrected Christ, “Simon, son of John do you love me?”

**When we look at today's gospel reading we find Peter** and 6 of the other disciples at the Sea of Tiberius fishing. They have left the place where they last encountered the resurrected Christ and returned to that which was familiar to them. It is as though the three years they spent with Jesus witnessing numerous miracles, hearing his teachings, and seeing him live out his message of hope, love, compassion, **and faith meant nothing. Not only that but they have** seen the resurrected Christ two times prior to their witness of him here at the Sea of Tiberius. It makes you ask, really, have they still not gotten that Jesus left them with the task of caring for **the poor, widowed, oppressed, and the orphaned?** Did they forget that they were to care for those who were imprisoned, to feed the hungry, to be a voice for those marginalized? Do they still question God's love for them? Today we have them fishing without any success until, unbeknownst to them, Jesus calls out from the **shore and tells them what to do. It is not until** they cast their nets on the right side of the boat and catch such a huge load they recognize it is Jesus that is talking to them from shore. It was in recognizing the risen Christ at that moment **that Peter clothes himself, jumps from the boat, and** swims to shore to greet the Savior.

You remember Peter, the disciple who pledged that he would not deny Jesus and yet he did three times. Peter, the one who pledged to **Jesus that he would go to jail for him, go to the**

ends of the earth for him, and die for him. Peter, the most talkative of the disciples, who loved to sit by Jesus, and spoke up “whether he had listened, studied or really believed what he was **saying. Although he had a problem staying awake at critical times,** Peter was ready to fight at any time. And at times his zeal got in the way. He had lots of ideas, but little carry through. Sound familiar? Peter was alright when he was just a student of Jesus’, but when the possibility of having to step in the gap and be like **Jesus arose; Peter lost his grip on his purpose. His** surface love needed a deeper anchor. His [human frailty] overshadowed his life with the divine nature of Jesus.”<sup>1</sup>

We have our Peter moments. We start out in faith with the same zeal and determination **that Peter had. We are certain that nothing** and no one will ever separate us from our love of God. Then it happens. It creeps doubt, distress, depression and disappointments. A time in which our lives get turned upside down and we somehow forget the love of God, the miracles and presence of the resurrected **Christ in our lives, and our call to be in service to others.** We get amnesia and like Peter and the disciples we return to the life that is familiar to us. Peter moments, indeed.

As Peter comes ashore to greet Jesus, he is met by a meal prepared by Christ himself. He **and the disciples are served breakfast by Jesus.** We then find Jesus and Peter alone on shore, presumably the other disciples have either fallen asleep from being awake all night and then eating a big meal or they are off preparing their large catch for sale at the market, we simply do not know, but we do know that Peter **and Jesus find themselves alone. Jesus is aware of all** that Peter has done just as he is aware of what we do in our daily lives. He also knew the heart of Peter, just as he knows our hearts. He knew Peter’s fears as he knows our fears. And Jesus **knew Peter’s faith and that is where he began** to work with Peter so that Peter could become all that God wanted him to be and so it is with us. Jesus is present to us in the love that

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. Dr. Teresa Fry Brown. “Forgiveness for Peter Moments.” Program 4702 October 12,2003

surrounds us and in the gift of the Holy Spirit, **lovingly confronting us and nurturing** us to live into our full potential as human beings and as children of God. Jesus lovingly confronted Peter.

**Question One:**

“Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” (Jn. 21:15; You know you are in **trouble when you are called by your full name.**) **Do you love me more** than your friends? Do you love me with all your soul, all your mind and all your strength? Do you love me more than money, title, power, position; is there anyone – boss, friend, life partner, children - that can come between us? “Do you, do you love me **Peter? Peter, will you honor our covenant or will** you divorce me at the first sign of trouble like you did a few days ago? Peter how much are you willing to sacrifice for me?”<sup>2</sup> Will you still love me tomorrow? We see Peter replying, “**Yes Lord; you know I love you.**” (Jn. 21:15)

Jesus then commands Peter to “Feed my lambs.” (Jn. 21:15) In essence he was saying to Peter, “go and do that which I **taught you and that which I have shown you.**” **Peter, you must** be willing to step outside of your comfort zone, your complacency, your disappointments, fears and doubts. Peter you are to encourage all people, no matter who they are or where they are on **life’s journey, regardless of how they smell, sound, think, look,** or even worship. Lead the people to where I want them to be. Prepare for them a place of refuge and rest just as I have done for you.

**Question Two**

“Simon son of John, do you love me?” is asked again of Peter. (Jn. 21:16; God has a way of repeating questions, information, **instructions, because we tend to have short and long term** memory problems – TFB) Do you have the kind of faith filled love Peter that is patient, kind and not afraid to see someone else doing better than you?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

**Peter replied to Jesus question of his love for him with, “Yes, Lord; you know I love you.”** Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” (Jn. 21:16) Here he is telling Peter, love others enough to tell them the truth. Follow the courage of your convictions and do not shift with the first wind of popularity or danger. **Care for the sick, widowed, orphaned, oppressed, and poor.** Care for those who are marginalized by society. “I love you Peter, I want to know if you will stand up for your beliefs. Peter, will you be able to rejoice in the Lord, even when it seems like you are all alone?”<sup>4</sup> **Will you still love me, tomorrow?**

### **Question Three**

We know that Peter denied Jesus three times and here we see Jesus asking him for the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” We are told that Peter’s feelings were hurt by **Jesus asking the same question a third time. (Jn. 21:17)** Yet as people of faith who know the rest of the story, we can surmise that Jesus is actually saying to Peter, forgive yourself. It is time Peter for you to be a different person and return to your responsibility, your faith, and your hope. It is time for you to care for **those who have also lost their way, seek out the unloved, take care of the lovesick, and teach the loveless.** “Our Lord asks us the same questions today: **Will you care for the people like I have cared for you?** Will you open ears to the cries of those in pain, stop driving by the helpless [and homeless]... believe the abused, [care for our children who are daily being forgotten, pay attention to what is happening to God’s creation and care for it], look at yourself **before you criticize the actions of others, pray without ceasing,...live out your call regardless of support by the world?** Are you willing to forgive like I have forgiven you?”<sup>5</sup> Do you love me? Will you still love me tomorrow?

Peter responded to Jesus question with, “Lord you know everything; my thoughts, my **words, my actions. Nothing I do can be hidden from you.**” And so again, Peter is

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

commanded to “Feed my sheep.” Jesus says to Peter and to us one final time, “Go and do what I have taught you in word and in **deeds.**” **Equip my sheep with the shields and tools they will** need to keep the faith and their hope in a failing economy. To keep the faith in a world that seems to be falling apart in the midst of so many natural disasters. Remind them of my promise **to never forsake or leave them as they find themselves** asking the questions “Why God?” or “Where are you in the midst of our loss, pain, and sorrow?” Teach my sheep through your own faith journey that sometimes the burdens of life can be heavy, but they are never alone. I serve them just as I have served you, but **with that service also comes responsibility. Just as they** have been fed and tended to, they must be willing to do the same for their sisters and brothers around them. Remind my sheep that they are loved and forgiveness is available to them in my **going to the cross for them. As people of faith, we** must feed and tend God’s sheep. We must love one another. It is in loving one another and caring for all of God’s creation that we, too can say, “Yes, Lord we love you.”

Jesus knows all about our times of reluctance, **our fears and our doubts, our times of** feeling defeated and even the times in which we question God’s call upon our lives. Our Peter moments. Yet, Jesus says to us “You are forgiven” and calls us back into the fold and says to us **you must care for one another. “Jesus accepts our apology, dismisses** the charges, exonerates our actions, purges our cowardice, wipes the slate clean, forgives all our Peter moments, and continues to challenge us to demonstrate our love for him by faithfully, freely, [tending to] and feeding his sheep.” **It is in community that we are able to nurture one** another and to remind one another that we are tended to, we are fed, and we are loved so that when we are asked **“Will you still love me tomorrow” we too may answer “Yes, Lord.”**

**Amen.**