

John 21:1-19  
May 1, 2022

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

He is risen! Alleluia!  
He is risen! Alleluia!  
He is risen! Alleluia!  
Thanks be to God!

Three times, three times Jesus ask Peter (aka Simon so of John), “Do you love me?” “Do you love me more than these”

Three times Peter gets it right. “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” The third time he is hurt. Maybe even a bit frustrated with Jesus. Who wouldn’t be? It may have seemed to him Jesus was testing his faith. How would we feel? Insert your own name, “\_\_\_\_\_ do you love me?” Isn’t once sufficient? After all Peter, in his responses, knows what we too know. He knows what Jesus knows. “Lord, you know that I love you.” “Lord, you know everything.”

If Jesus knows this, then why ask three times? Seems a bit like overkill, doesn’t it?

Three is an important number within the Bible. Of course, there is the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Of course, something major happens on the third day. He is risen! This is the third time the risen Jesus shows himself to his disciples. Three times Peter is asked a question.

The last time Peter was asked a question, it too was three times. Are you not one of his (i.e., Jesus) disciples? Three times Peter responds, “I am not.”

Repetition is key. Practice makes perfect. Ask any athlete, musician, artist, whatever hobby, skillset, vocation it might be there is truth in these sayings. To grow, one must try, try, and try again. Learn the rhythm. Cement the same stroke so that in those moments of pressure, when the game is on the line, heart pounding, the shot, the putt, the pass, whatever it might be has the best chance of doing what the athlete intends it to do. The spring play is this weekend at the high school. Those actors have no doubt studied and rehearsed their lines over and over. They’ve walked through their location on stage repeatedly. So that when the seats are full, all eyes upon them, nerves might be a bit shaky, all that hard work takes over. Confidence sets in that they are prepared. Ready. They can succeed.

I’ve heard it said over the years. Maybe even thought it myself a time or two. Our liturgy is a bit too repetitive. There is even a temptation to move away from it. That’s what other churches might be doing. Yet, there is a purpose for that liturgy. A reason we gather week in and week out. Pray the Lord’s Prayer. Confess our faith through the Creeds. Hear and the speak words of peace to one another. Because God acts through that repetition. The Spirit feeds us. We grow in our faith, in our love for Jesus, and into our calling as his disciples.

I've said it before, and I'll say it again. So many times, I have witnessed people at some of their most vulnerable times. It seems they've lost everything. They feel lost. Death might be knocking at the door. All hope might seem lost. Even God seems distant. Yet, in those times and through years of praying the Lord's prayer, hearing "Peace be with you," being fed through the word of God, the holy meal, singing a beloved hymn over and over and over again, these things come back.

The Holy Spirit is at work. The risen Christ is making himself known. God is abundantly providing. Jesus is loving till the end. I suppose it's why so many people return to worship following some sort of disaster. For a moment, the pews fill up. In their time of need, in their vulnerability, they need to know God is still present. Hope still lives. Christ is alive!

Which brings us back to Jesus asking Peter three times. I am not sure this is so much for Jesus' sake, but more so for Peter's sake. The risen Christ continues to teach. The Lord continues to equip. Peter is human just as we all are, which means we have a tendency to dwell in things that may not give life. Maybe I am reading into the text something that might be there, but I cannot help but think Peter may be dwelling in his three-fold denial of being one of Jesus' disciples. Focusing on his failure. It is keeping him from whom Jesus has called him to be. The mission Jesus has tasked him with. The joy of dwelling in the love of his Lord. Maybe he is a bit lost. Unable to see the risen Christ on the shore calling out to him. Maybe that's the reason he and the disciples have returned to that which they were doing prior to Jesus calling out to them the first time from the banks of the sea to "Come and see." There is comfort there. Security. Stability.

I just wonder if the words that are echoing in Peter's brain over and over like a broken record aren't "I am not." Jesus knows that Peter loves him, and certain Jesus knows this may still be haunting him. His sin holding him back from his purpose. So, three times Jesus invites him to say, "Lord, you know that I love you."

I wonder if that first time Peter's head was hung a bit low. Having a difficult time looking Jesus square in the eyes. Yet, think of the last time you told someone you loved them. Face-to-face. More than likely you looked them straight in the eyes. So they could see the love in your eyes. The compassion on your face. Three times, I imagine Peter peering deep into Jesus' eyes and saying, "Yes, Lord you know I love you." Three times, I imagine Jesus staring straight back and Peter seeing the love in Jesus' eyes for him. In affirming his love for Jesus, Jesus is at work affirming Peter's identity as a disciple. Jesus is at work loving him. Jesus is at work bringing Peter peace. Healing his aching soul. Feeding him. Preparing him for the challenging, dangerous, exhausting, work ahead that will lead him to places he will not want to go and ultimately to his death.

Jesus, in his three-fold questioning, is forcing Peter to set his sights directly on him. Three times he is also reminding Peter that he is called, set aside, equipped, sent with the purpose to "Feed and tend Jesus' sheep." He is to be a fisher of people.

This isn't simply Peter's calling. His identity. It is the churches too. People of God, do you love me? People of God, do you love me? People of God, do you love me? Yes, Lord you know that we do. Then feed my sheep. Tend my lambs. Love one another.

Three times. Thirty times. Three-hundred times. Three-thousand times. It cannot be said enough.

“Children. Precious children. Beloved children. You are loved. Jesus loves you! He is with you. His peace be with you. You are not alone. Never.”