

"THE HUMANNESS OF PETER"

John 21:15-21

John 18:15-27

MAUNDY THURSDAY, 2018

After breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"

"Yes, Master, you know I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

He then asked a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"

"Yes, Master, you know I love you."

Jesus said, "Shepherd my sheep."

Then he said it a third time: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was upset that he asked for the third time, "Do you love me?" so he answered, "Master, you know everything there is to know. You've got to know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. I'm telling you the very truth now: When you were young you dressed yourself and went wherever you wished, but when you get old you'll have to stretch out your hands while someone else dresses you and takes you where you don't want to go." He said this to hint at the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. And then he commanded, "Follow me."

WHY DOES HE KEEP ASKING ME THAT???

Why does he keep questioning my devotion to him? Was I not the first disciple chosen? Ok, well maybe I was or maybe I wasn't, it depends on who you talk to, but everyone knows I am Jesus' right-hand man!

I love him—I love that man. He captures my heart AND my head, and he makes me think about the world in ways I never have before. Since I've been hanging around with Jesus, I feel closer to God than I ever have before. It's as though God is living right in my mind, speaking to me, grooming me for greatness. I have never felt important before! Do you think people will remember what we have done here?

Jesus says things that people really need to remember. I see the Pharisees writing things down when he speaks, but they are not writing them down to tell others his good news. No, hardly! They are keeping a book on him, because he threatens their correctness, their holiness. I hear them talking all the time, talking in low tones about how to do Jesus in. It makes my skin crawl.

Don't they know he loves them, too? Don't they feel the love flowing from him like I do? Don't they see a hopeful future for the faith in what he says about taking care of the poor and the lame, about how he speaks gently to the lepers and the widows? I don't get it. I don't get how they see him as the enemy. Just because he hears God's call as a call to empathy and justice, what's so threatening about that??

I think Jesus is feeling a bit insecure these days. He keeps asking us if we love him, and he knows we do! Lately, he has started asking us if we will remember him after he's gone, and that question makes us very nervous. Usually when he starts talking this way, we just sit

quietly and look into each other's faces, because we are all trying to figure out just *what* he is saying?

What is all this talk of him going away? I tell you, if he would just tone it down a bit, turn down the volume on his lectures to the Pharisees, we would all be safer. If he would confine his healings to the back alleys and the leper colonies instead of performing his miracles right out in the open, maybe the authorities wouldn't notice us. And if he would quit testing all the Sabbath and purity laws right in the faces of the Pharisees, we would be much better off; we could continue our work! We could heal the sick and feed the hungry, give them a little justice.

Sometimes I wonder if he has a death wish. Sometimes, I wonder if he has a death wish for us all. That's *some way* to spread his message, right? Getting himself killed—and maybe us, too—is a sure way to kill his message. Then nobody will remember us at all or give a damn that we have been nailed to the cross. And for what? What will we have accomplished if we are all snuffed out and he is executed as a heretic, an enemy of the Jews and an unacceptable nuisance to the Romans.

Still, I love him. How can he question my loyalty???

Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. That other disciple was known to the Chief Priest, and so he went in with Jesus to the Chief Priest's courtyard. Peter had to stay outside. Then the other disciple went out, spoke to the doorkeeper, and got Peter in.

The young woman who was the doorkeeper said to Peter, "Aren't you one of this man's disciples?"

He said, "No, I'm not."

¹⁸ The servants and police had made a fire because of the cold and were huddled there warming themselves. Peter stood with them, trying to get warm.

Annas interrogated Jesus regarding his disciples and his teaching.

Jesus answered, "I've spoken openly in public. I've taught regularly in meeting places and the Temple, where the Jews all come together.

Everything has been out in the open. I've said nothing in secret. So why are you treating me like a conspirator? Question those who have been listening to me. They know well what I have said. My teachings have all been aboveboard."

When he said this, one of the policemen standing there slapped Jesus across the face, saying, "How dare you speak to the Chief Priest like that!"

Jesus replied, "If I've said something wrong, prove it. But if I've spoken the plain truth, why this slapping around?"

Then Annas sent him, still tied up, to the Chief Priest Caiaphas.

Meanwhile, Simon Peter was back at the fire, still trying to get warm.

The others there said to him, "Aren't you one of his disciples?"

He denied it, "Not me."

One of the Chief Priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, said, "Didn't I see you in the garden with him?"

Again, Peter denied it. Just then a rooster crowed.

DON'T LOOK AT ME THAT WAY!!! Don't talk to me. I've gone and done it now. He said I would deny him. He said I wouldn't be able to stand with him to the end. He said I would run away. He said it about

all of us, but he looked right at me when he said it. His eyes bore holes right through mine, right into my heart.

I was so mad at him! How could he know that my humanness would overtake my resolve? How did he know?

You don't understand what it was like for us then. How could you? I see you out there in your cushioned seats, judging me! you live in a time and place where you can freely profess your faith and practice it right out in the open. There are no Pharisees following you around, trying to trip you up on your knowledge of the scriptures. There's no one standing at the back of your sanctuary taking notes about how to destroy you. You can't be arrested just for being Christian! How could you know what it was like for us in the time of Jesus?

To acknowledge that I even knew him, much less that I was his disciple, was enough to have me arrested, shut away in darkness, starved, *beaten* within an inch of my life. We could be thrown up on a cross to die for looking the wrong way, for wearing the wrong clothes, for any violation of Roman law, no matter how slight. And our own people, the Jews—you'd think they would protect us from the Romans, wouldn't you? But NO, they did NOT protect us. They fed us to them like a fisherman feeds krill to a hungry shark to keep it away from the boat.

You don't know what it was like for me! I will thank you to keep your opinions to yourself about what I did or was not able to do. I am only *human*, and fear is the strongest human emotion. I succumbed to the fear. Just like he said I would. He followed through, but I was not able to, not then anyway.

Pray for me. Pray for me from the sanctity and security of your American life and your Christian church and your privileged status. There are people in your world today who are not free to profess their faith as are you, just remember that. And remember that I, Peter, sit right by you in your pew, drives the car just in front of yours, teach your children, deliver your mail, bags your groceries, and preaches to you from this pulpit. I, Peter, look back at you from your mirror when you peer into it inspecting your blemishes, your wrinkles, your stubbled beard, and your tired eyes.

We are all Peter. You, me, everyone. We are all Peter, and we are all loved unconditionally by God. Go figure. He knew me and he loved me anyway. Now is our time, *your* time, to return that love, to profess your faith, and to bring others to know the compassionate heart—the justice heart—the forgiving heart of the one who died loving us beyond his very last breath.

May It Be So.