

Loving Jesus Means Serving Others                      2025  
 Psalm 34:1-4, 8, 17-19, 22                      John 21:1-3, 9, 13-17, 24-25

Psalm 34:1-4, 8, 17-19, 22 (New Revised Standard Version)

I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad. O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together. I sought the Lord, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears. O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him. When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears, and rescues them from all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord rescues them from them all. The Lord redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

John 21:13-17, 24-25 (New Revised Standard Version)

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true. But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

When I go on a long trip, especially involving international travel,  
     I usually arrive exhausted, weary, stressed and worn out,  
     ready for it to be over and get back to feeling normal again.

**For Peter and the other disciples,**

    their Passion journey toward Easter had been exciting & exhausting.  
     It had been an emotional roller coaster of traumatic events.

There was the incredible joy of the triumphant entry into Jerusalem,  
     the teachings, parables and conflicts that week at the Temple,  
         and, of course on Thursday in the Upper Room Supper,  
             with the foot washing and the command to love & serve.

But then there was also the arrest of Jesus that terrible night,  
when the drowsy & fearful disciples fled & abandoned him,  
and Peter's three denials, just as Jesus had foretold,  
it had all been quite a ride.

Then the next day, the horrible suffering and death on the cross,  
along with both the fear and the grief of that long sad weekend.  
Then the shock and confusion of the empty tomb on Easter,  
and trying to make sense of the resurrection appearances.

It had been a long and difficult week, and the disciples were spent,  
and all wrung out emotionally, spiritually, and even physically,  
and wondering what to think about the resurrection,  
and wondering, what were they supposed to do now?

So, then Peter announces, "I'm going fishing."  
I'm going back to normal, something where I know what to expect,  
and half a dozen other disciples were ready to join with him.

If you've ever been out on the water in a boat very late at night,  
then you know about that certain quiet peace in the dark stillness,  
a very good place for deep thinking and careful reflection.

While fishing, the disciples had some big issues to consider,  
their own faithlessness and failure in abandoning Jesus,  
and so, what were they supposed to do now?

What in the world was going to happen next,  
and what were they supposed to think about the resurrection?  
Were things going to go back as they were – or what?

The disciples had failed, miserably.  
Peter had denied even knowing Jesus three times,  
and all of the disciples had fled, abandoning him,  
doing serious damage to their relationship with Jesus  
and they probably were feeling sheepish and guilty.

And typical of John's Gospel,  
there is way more going on with more connections than the obvious.  
**This text is about Jesus restoring the disciples to ministry.**

You may also recall **the Last Supper** in the Upper Room, Luke 22:19,  
Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them,  
saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Today's text, they share fellowship at **the Last Breakfast**, vs. 13,  
Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.  
Yes, John is using sacramental language to make a connection.

The point of the sacrament of Communion is to serve as a sign

of our connection through grace with our God and neighbors,  
and with our focus on Jesus, we are connecting  
with every believer of every age, time and place.

In addition, the word **charcoal fire** is used only twice in Scripture,  
and the author uses it to indicate another important connection.

The first time

was the night Peter denied even knowing Jesus 3 times, in John 18.18,

Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing round it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

The second time as we heard earlier today, is vs. 9,

When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread.

All of these connections are about restoration, making things right,  
so that Peter & the others were recommissioned to serve the Church,  
especially Peter who failed so miserably with 3 denials,  
and yet will be an important leader for the ministry ahead.

Listen again for the grace, the healing and restoration, vs. 15-17

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "**Feed my lambs.**"

A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "**Tend my sheep.**"

He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "**Feed my sheep.**"

This was not a cheap grace of denying or ignoring his past failure.

Three times, when asked, Peter had denied knowing Jesus.

Three separate times Jesus asks, "do you love me?" - "yes Lord."

Three times Jesus invited Peter to re-declare his love,  
and three times, Jesus then commanded Peter,  
to serve, to tend and to feed his flock.

Jesus is releasing Peter from the shame of his cowardly denials  
so that Peter will then be able to care and feed God's sheep,  
to serve with energy, intelligence, imagination & love.

If you love me, then feed and tend my people. Serve them faithfully.  
You've got work and mission to do. Respond to my love **with love**,  
by making a difference, by letting that grace flow through you.

**"If you do love me, then come back and use your gifts for ministry."**

Jesus wanted to restore Peter in a healthy and healing way,  
by providing some space for truth and reconciliation,  
an opportunity to release Peter from his burden of guilt.

Jesus asked, Peter, do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me?  
The question was, will you let the Lord take away your shame,  
and will you let that love and grace transform your life?

**That is how God handles our failures and mistakes, our brokenness.**

If we do truly love the Lord, and if we do trust the Lord,  
then we respond to the gracious love and mercy of God  
through our willingness to obey the call of the Lord.

If you love me, then feed and tend my people and notice their needs.  
You've got some important work to do. Respond to my love **with love**,  
by leading & strengthening the faith of my other disciples  
to serve with energy, intelligence, imagination & love.

The message is, things aren't going to go back to the way they were,  
but you must carry on, knowing that I am returning to the Father.

Now you must become the Church, the body of Christ,  
a growing fellowship of believers – my followers,  
**and you must carry out the mission of the Church.**

We at 1<sup>st</sup> Pres. must also hear and heed that message of hope & truth.  
Clearly, much of the familiar church-life we've shared together,  
it's going to change and be different when I retire and we leave.

**So where are you called to go from here?**

I believe part of the answer is where we are, the word is sanctuary,  
that is our mission, the people and place we're called to be,  
a safe place for all where God's gracious love is lived.

The truth is, God could have created this world in just black & white,  
but our God chose to create in magnificent & vibrant amazing color.

If humans came in just a few standard types & models, easier & simpler  
yes, but the Lord chose to create us each one unique and special.

**The Lord doesn't choose simple, easy or the most cost-efficient,  
and as a faithful & obedient body of Christ, neither should we!**

Consider this, who are the people who most influenced your life?  
Which teachers, coaches, scoutmasters, neighbors, etc.?

Their chief concern and focus, the impact that they had on you,  
was not on finishing quickly, or the most simple and efficient,  
but they took the time & effort to connect, to care & guide,

making a real effort to matter and make a real difference,  
and **that's probably what God desires and wants from each of us.**

**Our call as Christians and as the Church of Jesus Christ**  
**is to be that person, and to be that influence for others.**

God wants his love and his truth to take root, to grow and expand,  
to transform and bring renewed hope and healing into human lives,  
for this church family to reach out and bless other people.

There is a whole world of hurt and need out there,  
and God has called each of us to make a difference,  
for us to respond by doing something that matters.

In our world there is **an urgent desperation** for love and mercy  
that is hampered and blocked by fear, by regret, shame and guilt.  
People are wounded, sharply divided, unable to get past their past,  
desperate for reason to trust, for grace, hope, acceptance & love,  
**and all of that is what the Church is called & equipped to do best.**

And what an amazing, what an overwhelmingly wonderful thing  
when someone does finally grasp **how very much God loves them**,  
as they begin to experience the authentic joy and peace  
of a growing & deepening real relationship with Jesus,  
and a sense of belonging to something greater than themselves.

In the John passage,  
Jesus was calling the disciples to see and perceive **a new vision**,  
**a vision of reaching out to the world in need**,  
**by reflecting the truth of God's gracious love.**

As we consider the changes ahead for all of us, I suggest that we  
place ourselves at the scene and try to experience it with Peter  
by personalizing what Jesus asked with your own name:

Norm	<u>do you love me?</u>	then	<b>"Feed my lambs."</b>
Norm	<u>do you love me?"</u>	then	<b>"Tend my sheep."</b>
Norm	<u>"Do you love me?"</u>	then	<b>"Feed my sheep."</b>

So, what excites you these days? Where is your passion, your dreams?  
What about today, will be worth having gotten out of bed?

And what can we do to live this day **to its absolute fullest?**

Do you dare compare your life today, to the hopes & aspirations that you once had?

We have only one shot at life – we'll live today, this day **only once**,  
so let us not miss or ignore the purpose for which we are here,  
but let us fulfill the reason that God gave us this day to live.

Let us embrace this day – each day for the wonderful gift that life is  
for surely God intends for us, some delight and blessing for today,

which means that our challenges and difficulties  
are really opportunities for God's grace to flourish,  
to grow and deepen in our lives, to transform our lives.

**My friends, what if God is speaking, and we aren't listening?**  
**What if Jesus is calling, and we aren't responding?**  
**What if the Spirit is leading, but we are not following?**

As Christians, we are loved and forgiven, but we're not flawless,  
and only by grace can we or will we ever move forward  
toward the life God created us to live and intends for us.

We can grow in faith the same way we first received Christ,  
through grace toward absolute dependency and trust in Jesus.  
There is no substitute for the Lord's work in our lives,  
and God's grace is the only way for our faith to thrive...

... and it thrives best **within a faith-community of saints and sinners**  
who encourage and support along each person's spiritual journey,  
for when among the company of the gathered people of God  
our faith will grow & progress with their help & presence.

The Church is something like being **a spiritual hotspot of grace**,  
helping us stay **well within WIFI range of Jesus Christ**,  
and that is our task and role as the body of Christ.

John Newton, the former slave-trader who wrote *Amazing Grace*,  
with age suffered from dementia, and was near death when he said,

"My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: That I am a great sinner  
and that Christ is a great Savior!"

Hear again the sustaining hope and promise, the truth of Psalm 34,

O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together. I sought the Lord, and he  
answered me, and delivered me from all my fears. O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed are  
those who take refuge in him.