

## **“Do You Love Me?”**

Today we come to the close of a series in which we've been dealing with a number of the questions Jesus asked of his followers (throughout his ministry) and, as a result, being challenged by what those same questions are asking of us today.

I don't know how it's felt for you (over these past few weeks) as we've worked our way through these (questions of Jesus) but, at least, for me, it's been a good experience to take some of these questions head-on. It's caused me to think through how important these questions really are.

It's also been one of the more difficult series (for me) to help pull together, and not because there's a lack of material from which to pull. From his three and a half years of ministry (in the four gospel stories), there are more than 300 questions recorded that Jesus asked.

The challenge has not been in the lack of material, but in the challenging nature of the material itself. Jesus' questions go deep. They get at the heart of what really matters in life. And, if we're honest (with ourselves) and allow them to do what they were intended to do, they go right after what's happening in (our own) lives.

That's (the part) that has been the most challenging. And it's been challenging, because it's not possible to preach on these questions (asked by Jesus) without (in the process) having to ask them of myself.

Our hope has been that that's (exactly what) has happened (for each of us) in this series. Because, when Jesus asked the questions, he wasn't just asking questions. He was leading, he was guiding, he was taking his disciples on a “Quest” that would (in the final analysis) change their lives. Our hope has been that these same questions will have done something similar in us.

Before turning to the question in front of us today, think back (with me) for a moment on where we've been and some of the questions we've taken on. (Very quickly) It all started with a question of invitation. Jesus, (right out of the shoot) asks the question, “What do you want? What are you looking for? What are you hoping to find?” In so doing, he invites us to follow. He extends an invitation to come and see for ourselves.

From there, it was a question of how serious we are. (It all starts to build.) “Do you want to get well,” (he asks)? Do you want me to do (in your life) what only I can do in your life? Or is this whole (Jesus thing), for you, only a passing thought?

The next question, it was question of “worry.” “Why do you worry?” If God is really God and if this God in which you believe actually cares, then why do worry about the things you worry about, when the things you worry about, your worrying won't even help?

From there, it was a question of our willingness to offer what we have to Jesus, to give back what he's given to us. “How many loaves do you have?” is what he asks. (It'll never be enough.) It'll never be enough. But if you give what you have to Christ (no matter how small you think it is), you might be surprised how far it goes.

From there, it starts hitting (even deeper), a question of our compassion. “Do you see this woman,” (he asks)? And not just on the outside (where you can judge her) by what you see, but on the inside where (instead of judging her), you might actually end up judging (and realizing) the need in your own life.

And then it's the question of identity. “Who do you say Jesus is?” Forget about what others might say. (It doesn't matter what they say.) What do you say about Jesus? Who is Jesus (in your life) to you?

And then (last week), setting it up for today, if he is your Lord (which you say he is) and if he is your Savior (which he died to become), then why are so quick (in your words) to refer to him as “Lord,” when (you’re not quite so quick) to actually change what you’re doing in your life? That’s where we’ve been, and those are the questions with which we’ve had to face.

And so we come to the final week in this series, and so we’re confronted with the one question that ultimately counts. If all of what we’ve said over the past seven weeks means anything, then (our answer) to this final question (Jesus asks) means everything. You might say, in that sense, it’s the ultimate test.

Picture the scene with me for a moment. We read just a few verses from that (final chapter) in John’s gospel. It’s after Jesus’ death on the cross and during that time (after he was raised from the dead), before he ascends back into heaven. It’s during that 40-day period where he made a number of appearances to his followers.

One of his final appearances was by the Sea of Galilee. We didn’t read that part today, but it (sets up) the part we did read. I find it interesting that it’s the very place where this whole thing started, three and a half years earlier. The disciples, when they were (first called), were fishing, and now (after his resurrection), it’s the same thing.

In this (last chapter), they’re in a boat, all night long, trying to catch some fish, but there was nothing. Along comes Jesus, commands them to throw out their nets on the other side and (when they do), they can barely pull in the catch, there’s so many.

And that’s when they realize it. “It’s the Lord!” And so what do they do? (You remember.) They pull in their nets, make their way to the shore, and they sit down with Jesus, around a fire, and share a meal.

Now, it’s not the focus of our story today, but don’t miss the significance of what’s happening. Jesus gathers with his followers (after his resurrection) around a meal. They sit with Jesus. They commune with Christ. He gives them the bread. He passes around the fish.

It says, “They said nothing” to Jesus. (It says), “None of them dared ask him ‘Who are you?’ (It says), “They knew it was the Lord.” They knew that this one (in their presence) was the risen Christ. They knew it.

Sounds a lot like what happens when we share a meal, right here in this sanctuary, around this table, gathered together in his name. Jesus gives us the bread (and the wine). We gather and we commune in the presence of Christ. Jesus still appears, as he did back then. Our Lord is just as present (with us) today, as he was with them. It’s a side note (in the story), but don’t miss it. It’s significant..

And that’s when it happened. That’s when it took place. (That’s where we started reading today.) After the meal, when they had finished eating, Jesus turns to Simon Peter and asks the one question that ultimately counts.

“Simon son of John, ‘Do you love me?’” Simon son of John, ‘Am I first and foremost in your life?’” Simon son of John, forget about all the rest and forget about what has (already happened), where you’ve failed...all of that is in the past...Starting today, from here on, (you tell me), what place and position will you give me in your life?”

That’s the question Jesus asks and that’s the (same question) to which you and I must answer. At the end of the day...how committed are you in your relationship with Jesus? At the end of the day...who’s running the show (in your life) and who isn’t? At the end of the day, when all is said and done, set everything aside and (you tell me), “Do you (or do you not) love Christ?”

That’s an interesting phrase, “at the end of the day.” It’s one of those phrases that has (recently) become more common in our culture.

At the end of the day...he’s really not what we’re looking for, so we’re going have to move on in our search.

At the end of the day...who cares what someone else thinks about that relationship in your life, you're the one who has to decide.

At the end of the day...it's a generous offer, but I'm going to have to turn it down.

At the end of the day...that kid at my school isn't such a great influence, so I think I need to change friends.

At the end of the day...it all comes down to this, it all boils down to this one single thing...when all is said and done...everything else set aside...here's where I land...at the end of the day.

At the end of the day, "Do you love Jesus?" At the end of the day, "How much (in your life) are you in love with Christ?"

It's just like that phrase, "at the end of the day," it's the same thing with the word "love." It's a word we use quite often. (We all use it.) And, depending on when and where (and how) it's used, it can mean different things.

When I stand up here (on Sunday morning), and look out at those of you who are here, I can tell you (without exception) that I love you. (I really do.) I love you, as brothers and sisters in the faith. I love you, because we share the same faith. I love you, because I know Jesus loved you, and because he loved you and brought us together, I need to do the same. I really do love you.

It's different, however, when I go home (later on), throughout the week, and I see my kids. I can say the same thing, (the same words), but it's different. When I tell them I love them, it's the same thing (as when I tell you), but it's different, because they're my kids and the relationship we have is different, so the meaning is different.

Keep it going. When I say the same thing to my wife, after more than 31 years of marriage, all the things we've shared, all the experiences we've gone through, the commitments, the sacrifices, the joys...it's the same words, but it's different, it's (so much) different, because it's different.

Now, take that same difference and apply it to the question from Jesus. What happens when the question of your love comes from Christ? What happens when the question of your commitment is posed to you by your Lord? What happens when the question of how serious you are in your relationship with him, comes from the one who choose to relate to you, and to forgive you, and to (save you) from the very start?

When Jesus asked Simon Peter, it was a question that meant everything. After three and a half years, all of the other questions he'd asked, none of them mattered, apart from this one.

Three times he asked it. Three times he laid it straight out. After three denials on that Good Friday morning, after three times when Peter said he had (and wanted) nothing to do with Christ.

I wonder how it felt for Peter, (when he was asked) by Jesus? I can only imagine how intense it must have been when Jesus called him by his full name.

I still remember when my parents used my full name in the conversation. It didn't matter. I knew (if nothing else) that I'd better straighten up. This was serious, no joking matter. This was not a time to pretend (even if I could) as if I didn't know.

"Simon, son of John, do you love? Simon, son of John, am I first and foremost in your life? Simon, son of John, are you ready to give your all to the one who gave his all for you? If you are (and I am), then here's what I want you to do. If you are (and I am), then here's how I want you to live."

It's the same question for us. It's the question for you. And it's the same response (to the question) Jesus wants to hear. And, again, don't miss the point.

All of this "Quest," in which Jesus is leading us? This isn't about doing what you need to do (in your life) to be saved. This question comes from the one who has already saved you. This isn't about responding (in your life) in a way that will make you right with God. This all starts with the one who has already made us

right. This entire “Quest,” it all starts with him. It all starts with his invitation, his forgiveness, his acceptance of us. It starts with his calling.

From there, then come the questions. From there, that’s where it starts getting real. And it starts getting real, because it has to do with how we live and respond (in our lives) today.

If you love me...then here’s how you should live. If you love me...then here’s what I want you to do.

And so, you tell me, let’s start getting real...

(at this Point Pastor Dan walked into the congregation and asked individuals some of these questions)

\_\_\_\_\_, “Do you love Jesus?...If so, then make sure it plays out that way in your life

\_\_\_\_\_, “Do you love Jesus?...If so, then change what needs to change to align your priorities with his

\_\_\_\_\_, “Do you love Jesus?...If so, then don’t be afraid to speak his name when you have the chance

\_\_\_\_\_, “Do you love Jesus?...If so, then use the gifts you’ve been given in ways that will give honor to him

\_\_\_\_\_, “Do you love Jesus?...If so, then when it comes up at school, ask him to help you to have courage and find the right words

\_\_\_\_\_, “Do you love Jesus?...If so, then make sure he’s central in your marriage and your family

\_\_\_\_\_, “Do you love Jesus?...If so, then don’t let the things you wish you would have done in the past stand in the way of what he’s calling you to do in the present...

St. Timothy’s Lutheran Church, San Jose, California, 2017...”Do you love Jesus?”...If so, then do in your life what he is calling you to do in your life

At the end of the day...That’s all that matters. It’s all that matters, because (at the end of the day), it all starts and ends with him...at the end of the day. Let’s pray.