**Series: Questions God Asks**

**Sermon: Do You Love Me?**

Show video of “epic fails”

These failures are fun to watch, although I’m sure the guys involved didn’t think it was all that funny. Because somebody managed to record the failures we get to enjoy them and they’ll never completely live it down.

Everybody fails sometimes. Some of our failures are simple things that really don’t affect anybody but ourselves. Some impact a lot of lives.

Failure isn’t always a fatal thing. In fact it’s often harmless. What matters is what we do after failing. When you fail, what do you do next? Do you quit? Do you determine that you’re not worthy and so you so you get out?

That was the dilemma for one of Jesus’ closest friends. Peter had told Jesus that whatever happens, he’s all in. He would follow and serve Jesus no matter what.

         *Even if everybody else falls away -*  – *I will never fall away*. Matthew 26:33

         *I will lay down my life for you*, he said to Jesus. John 13:37

Y’all know what happened. Jesus predicted that in fact, Peter would vociferously deny even knowing Him. And of course, Peter did just that. Three times, one time even calling down curses upon himself if he was lying. *I swear. I don’t know the man*. Matthew 26:74

In one of the more poignant scenes in the Bible, on that third denial Peter remembered what Jesus said.

The text say, *he wept bitterly*. I imagine so. Talk about an epic failure. What will Peter do now? Will he quit? Since he’s no longer worthy, will he drop out?

Jesus didn’t want anything between Himself and Peter, and He didn’t want Peter quitting, so He asked him this question: *Do you love me?*

The scene is somewhere on the shore of the Sea of Galilee near the town of Tiberias. Early in a morning Jesus appeared to His disciples who had returned to fishing.

They hadn’t caught anything when Jesus showed up and told them to throw their net on the right side of the boat. When they did they caught 153 fish. John recognized Jesus first, but then so did Peter who couldn’t wait to row to shore but instead he jumped in the water and swam to Jesus.

Jesus had prepared a fire so they cleaned some of the fish and had breakfast. Verse 20 tells us they had taken a short walk and the other men followed. I think we can fairly conclude that it was a private discussion. We only know about it because Peter told someone.

We pick up the story here:

*When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”*

*Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Shepherd my sheep.”*

*The third time He said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.* John 21:15-17

If you’ve ever studied this passage or if you’ve ever heard a sermon on it I’m sure you learned that different words were used for “love”, “feed”, and “sheep.” And I imagine that you learned some interesting things about those words.

Let me say this: the differences don’t mean much.

         The first two times when Jesus asked, *Do you love me?* He used the word . That’s the verb form of the word  referring to the unselfish total love God has for us. The third time He used , a word that leans a bit more toward the love friends have for each other.

         Each time Peter responded, *Yes. You know I love you*, using the word 

         It sounds like a significant difference until we realize that John used these words almost interchangeably:

o   John 3:35, *The Father loves* () the Son…

o   John 5:20, *The Father loves* () the Son…

o   In John 13:23, 19:26, 21:7 referring to himself John wrote, *the disciple whom Jesus loved* ()…

o   In John 20:2 he wrote…*the other disciple, the one Jesus loved* ()…

         So we’re not going to make much of the different words for “love”, nor will we suggest any significance that He used both  and  for “feed”, or that He used both  and  for sheep.

The important thing here is what He asked. *Do you love me?* He wasn’t searching for new information. He knew Peter’s heart. He knew Peter loved Him. He also knew that Peter was struggling. Peter didn’t know if he should go on, after all, he had failed in epic fashion. Was he worthy even to be Jesus’ disciple let alone Apostle?

Jesus wanted Peter to examine himself. He wanted Peter to decide, if he loves Jesus, does his failure disqualify him from serving Jesus? What’s more important? His love for Jesus or his sense of failure?

You see, Peter did love Jesus. I can only speculate why he went back to fishing for fish, but I suspect he wasn’t sure what to do. Does he have a right to speak for Christ when he himself couldn’t live up to his promises? Is he worthy of representing the Savior.

Jesus wanted to restore Peter to his promised role, *Blessed are you, Simon son of John…I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.* Matthew 16:17f Jesus wanted Peter to act on that.

It bothered Peter that Jesus asked him the same question three times, but I think it was because Peter had failed Jesus three times and Jesus knew that affirming his love three times would be important to Peter.

May I speak for God this morning and ask you, *Do you love me?*

*I know you’ve failed me. I know you didn’t speak up for me when your friends were mocking Jesus or making fun of people of Christian faith. I know you were afraid that they would laugh at you. I know you were concerned that they wouldn’t be your friends any more. I know you don’t think you know enough to defend your own faith*.

*I know that sometimes you do the very things you know a Christian shouldn’t, and sometimes you don’t do the thing you know a Christian should*.

*I know that sometimes you don’t think you deserve to be a Christian. I know that sometimes you don’t think you’re good enough to wear the name of Jesus. I know that you have a hard time living up to a Christian standard*.

I want you to realize, God doesn’t ask, *Do you get it all right?* He knows we don’t because we can’t. He knows we’re weak, we’re worldly, we struggle with our sin.

He doesn’t ask, *Are you perfect?* He knows we’re not. He knows we suffer from a condition called “human.” He understands our frailties.

Being a Christian isn’t about being perfect or always getting it right. It’s about loving Jesus. God doesn’t want anything between us and Him. Because we’ve all failed Him, we’ve all done things we’re ashamed of, He asks, *Do you love me?*

He wants us to examine ourselves and decide if we really love Him.

When Peter affirmed his love, Jesus told him to do what he was called to do. Peter was called to be an Apostle, the lead Apostle. *If you love me, do what you’re were called to do, feed my sheep*.

What does it mean for us if we affirm our love for Jesus? I suggest two answers:

1.    I suggest that the first answer to what does it mean to love Jesus, is that we obey whatever He taught. Jesus said, *If you love me, you will obey what I command.* John 14:15

In one of Sheryl Baker’s posts this week she quoted Jesus from the New Living Translation: *If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross and follow me*. Matthew 16:24 Then she quoted Thomas A. Kempis, *Jesus has many lovers of His Heavenly Kingdom, but few bearers of His cross*.

Loving Jesus is so much more than agreeing that He’s a good guy. It doesn’t mean that we simply appreciate His death on the cross and His love for us. According to Jesus Himself, if we love Him it means that we obey His teaching, that we bear His cross, that we follow Him even when it’s a burden to do so.

(I would add, that since the Apostles spoke and wrote with the authority of Jesus, obeying Him includes obeying their teaching as well.)

If you love Jesus you obey His teaching about:

         How we act and talk

         How we treat people

         How and how often we worship

         How we handle money

         How we do our marriages

You know the issues. I don’t need to list them. If you love Jesus it means you do what He says and don’t do what He says “*don’t*.” It means that you obey all of His teaching, not just the parts you like.

That’s a problem for many Christians today. They want to choose what teachings they like and are comfortable with but ignore others. It doesn’t work that way. Jesus also said, *If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching...He who does not love me will not obey my teaching.* John 14:23f

If we choose to not obey Jesus, we demonstrate that we do not love Him.

What does it mean to love Jesus? It means that we obey Him.

2.    A second answer is that to love Jesus means that we do whatever ministry God has called us to and gifted us for. We have said many times, every believer is gifted to do ministry. *To each* (and every) *believer the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good*. 1 Corinthians 12:7

To love Jesus means that we do what He planned for us to do. *We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do*. Ephesians 2:10

God planned ministry for you before you ever became a Christian. To love Jesus means that you do it. It doesn’t have to be anything huge or public. If you love Him get busy with whatever He planned and gifted you to do.

I have spent my whole career in this church. This is where I believe God planned for me to serve. About half of my time here we were a small church. For a while we’ve been a mid-sized church. I have friends who preach at very large churches.

God sent Ben Cachiaras to a church of over 5000 members. He sent Dudley Rutherford to a church of nearly 10,000 members.

I have many more friends who God sent to small churches. We’d all like the opportunity to preach before a crowd, but more than that we want to do whatever He called us to.

Loving Jesus isn’t about doing great things. It’s about obeying Him and doing whatever He planned and gifted us for.

That’s true for you and it’s true for me. ***Do you love me? Feed my sheep!***