

Do You Love Me?

Simon Peter is out on his fishing boat alongside the other disciples. He is brooding and not quite sure what to make of all that had happened. Then there is a flashback. He recalls how he left his fishing nets at the seashore to become a follower of Jesus. How Jesus changed his name from Simon to Peter the Rock! All of a sudden, things turned sour. Jesus was arrested and Peter the Rock got scared and denied his Lord three times. The next day, Good Friday, Jesus was nailed to a cross and Simon Peter was devastated, shattered, defeated, and broken hearted. Then came Easter and Simon Peter was now thrilled beyond belief, excited, and gratified over Christ's resurrection.

Confused and perplexed about his own future Peter returns to Galilee with his friends. Several days pass and nothing has happened. Peter and his friends have been waiting there in Galilee for some time just waiting, waiting for some direction from God, but nothing has happened. *Finally, in typical fashion, Simon Peter gets impatient.* He can't take it anymore, and he says, *"I'm going fishing!"* The others go along with him. They fish all night, but no luck. Then dawn breaks, they see someone standing on shore. It's the Risen Lord, but they don't recognize him at this point. He tells them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat. They do, and they bring in a huge catch of fish. John turns and says to Peter, "It is the Lord." Simon Peter excitable and impulsive dives in and swims to shore urgently. The others come in on the boat. As they come ashore they see the Risen Christ cooking breakfast for them over a charcoal fire. John tell us the details of the breakfast to underscore the reality of the resurrection. The resurrection was not a vision, not a dream, not some hallucination, not a hoax. Not the figment of someone's excited imagination, not a plot or ploy. Not an appearance of a ghost. No! The Risen Lord has defeated death... and is out there on the seashore cooking breakfast for his friends and eating with them. Ghosts don't eat. Jesus in his earthly resurrected body is eating!

Following the meal there is an encounter between Jesus and Peter that is charged with emotions fear, guilt, remorse, excitement, self-doubt, and bewilderment. Simon Peter is feeling all of those and much, much more. He is at the crossroads wondering how he responds to Easter. Imagine what is racing through Peter's head. Jesus has yet to have a heart to heart with him about his three denials. They are now sitting down to a meal together once again. Do you remember what Peter told Jesus last time they had a meal together? It was at the Passover and he told the Lord that he would never betray him; "I will lay down my life for you." Jesus said he would deny him three times and he did. Now all Peter can think about is the guilt of his denial and self-doubt. Knowing the great risks involved and knowing painfully that he had already failed miserably once? He wimped out, denied his Lord three times! What if he did it again? He was thinking, "I'm just a coward at heart. Maybe I should just go back to the old secure life on my fishing boat. How could He ever forgive me anyway? How could He ever trust me again? I bragged, I boasted about my strength and commitment, I talked big... but then when the crisis came... I let Him down."

Jesus knew what was going on deep down inside of Simon Peter and just as he gave Thomas what he needed letting him touch his scars physically now he reached out to touch Simon Peter emotionally with the help and healing he needs. He takes him aside and says, "Simon, do you love Me?" "Oh yes, Lord," Peter answers, "You know that I love You." "Then feed My sheep," Christ says to him. They go through this ritual three times. "Simon, do you love Me?" "Yes Lord, you know I love You." "Then feed My sheep." Three times! Peter's receives a three-fold affirmation of love to wipe out the bitter memory of his three-fold denial. Jesus was saying to Simon Peter, "I believe in you. You are still the Rock. You can do it... but you have to put your failure behind you. You are forgiven. The slate is wiped clean. You can start over again." That is precisely what the Risen Christ does for us. He knows about our failures and our fears and He still loves us, He still believes in us and He comes to us with healing and forgiveness.

That is the good news of Easter. God's gracious, sacrificial love for us expressed so magnificently in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Helen Steiner Rice put it like this: *"The priceless gift of life is love, for with the help of God above, Love can change the human race and make this world a better place. For love dissolves all hate and fear and makes our vision bright and clear. So we can see and rise above our pettiness on 'wings of love.'"*