

Feed my Sheep.

Love is a scary thing you know. Falling in love can be the most frightening and thrilling thing in your world. The love we have for our children is a little scary because it can also be fraught with frustration and fear for the future. We cannot protect them from everything. Love can compel us to stand up for what is right and to put ourselves in positions of criticism or it can compel us to remain silent and tread softly. Love can have us forgiving even the most hurtful of things....like Jesus forgiving Peter after his denial.

We can let fear tinge our love for others. Our own desire to survive or to control can impact on the way we see the world and how we treat those who we love. Love involves a giving of oneself and vulnerability that many find frightening and some people don't know how to give themselves completely to another without intense fear.

Love can also impact on fear. We can overcome even the greatest of fears by being empowered by the love that we have – or the love that we have found. One of the greatest of human fears is that we are unlovable. That we will be

alone. That no one could really love us if they knew us for who we are – if they could read our darkest of thoughts. No one could possibly love us – so sometimes we have to pretend to be someone else. So we hide ourselves and protect ourselves or maybe even refuse to engage or play word games....that's what we see here today. Peter is playing word games.

Now let's look at the context of today's Gospel. Jesus has appeared to the disciples for the 3rd time after his death. This section comes directly after Jesus appearing while the disciples were fishing. They did not recognise them until he told them where to fish and ate a meal with them. There is a common theme about recognising Jesus in the breaking of the bread in the Gospels. After they have finished breakfast –

Jesus asks Peter 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these? Peter replies 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' And Jesus says 'Feed my lambs'. This sequence is repeated 3 times. On the third time Peter felt hurt and said to Jesus 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you'. I would like to signpost something here for your thoughts – This is the third

time Jesus has appeared, he asks Peter three times about his love.....how many times did Peter deny Christ? There is symbolism here. Something profound is being revealed about the nature of the resurrection, about love and about forgiveness.

Love is a funny thing. How can Peter feel such hurt when Jesus is asking about love? Can we feel defensive when talking about love? Maybe there is more going on here than meets the eye. Let's look at the Greek.

There are two words for love that are being used in this section. *Agape* – the love that transcends all things and *Philio* – a familial love.

Jesus says 'Simon son of John, do you *agape* me more than these?' 'Simon son of John, does your love for me transcend all people and things?' Simon replies 'Yes, Lord; you know that I *philio* you – you know that I love you like a brother.'then tend my lambs.

Number 2. Jesus says ‘Simon son of John, do you *agape* me?’ ‘do you love me with a divine love?’ ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I *philio* you – I love you like a brother’. ...Tend my sheep.

Now is time for number 3 and Peter is feeling a little hurt when he hears from the mouth of Jesus – ‘Simon, son of John – do you *philio* me....do you love me like a brother’ouch....Jesus changes his words to meet Peter where he is at – but the change of language is not lost on Peter. ‘Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you like a brother’. Feed my Sheep.

This scene is action packed! So many things are being communicated here about our relationship with God!

1. Is recognising Christ in the stranger. This is how the reading is prefaced – the disciples initially didn’t know who Jesus was.
2. Is the nature of God’s love. Here we see Peter is forgiven on a deep and symbolic level. But he has also failed a little. He has not been able to give Jesus the love that he asked for. Instead of Jesus saying ‘Well it’s my way or the highway buddy’, he meets Peter where he is at. Peter for some reason is

unable at this point to articulate his transcendent love for God instead offering a brotherly love.

On the third time – the brotherly love is what Jesus asks for. Peter is forgiven and Jesus accepts the love that Peter is offering. Peter is still learning and is yet to fully understand. The other thing is – no matter what ‘love’ Peter is offering – the command is still the same. Go out and look after the flock.

Three take home points:

1. No matter what your love for God looks like – we must look after each other and constantly extend the invitation for others to join the fold. Over and over again – we must look after each other and invite others into our community. No matter what your love for God looks like. If it is a little nugget of love that still isn’t really sure if God exists or not or if your love is so great that you have given all your possessions to the poor. We can see the determination to tend God’s flock and invite others in through St. Paul’s mission to the Gentiles. How do we tend to the flock and invite in our

everyday lives? Do we? Inviting someone to Church or to a Church group is a little scary and we don't want people to think that we are crazy. So we are often reserved and hold to our heart the things we hold dear.

2. The nature of forgiveness. In the death and resurrection of Christ – we see at the heart of God love which cannot exist without forgiveness. God agapes us – loves us beyond all things. This includes our sin. Just like Peter. It doesn't matter what you have done – God loves you and the only appropriate response to God's love and forgiveness is love, joy and changing our ways. How do you celebrate God's all forgiving love in your life? Does it make it easier for you to forgive others to know that you are forgiven?

3. Love means acceptance. In order to truly love someone – we must first accept who they are. Not an idealised image of them. Peter for some reason did not respond to Jesus with the same love that Christ was offering. Maybe the divine agape love is beyond most of our capabilities? Or maybe it is too frightening – because agape love demands acceptance and forgiveness. Jesus meets Peter where he is at and loves him all the same. Jesus doesn't yell or

cry or feel rejected. Peter doesn't have to love Jesus with a transcendent love for Jesus to love him in that way. Our love for others should not be dependent on whether we are loved back or quite frankly if we even like the person. When we accept others for who they are – without trying to control them or change them – we are loving with a divine love. When we forgive even the hugest of betrayals – like Peter's denial - we are loving with a divine love.

So when you leave here today – remember.

1. No matter what your love for God looks like – feed his sheep.
2. God loves you – it doesn't matter what you have done. Forgiveness is divine. Go out and spread God's love and forgiveness – feed his sheep.
3. Love means acceptance. Accept people for who they are – so you can love the real person, not an image. Go out and feed his sheep.