

[John 21:1-17](#)

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### DO YOU LOVE ME?

One of my favorite musicals of all-time is, *Fiddler on the Roof*. What a terrific show that is! Well, toward the END of *Fiddler on the Roof*, there's a very TOUCHING scene between Tevye and his wife, Golde. Tevye asks her: *Do you love me?* And though it seems to US like a STRANGE question, we need to remember that, in THOSE days, marriages were ARRANGED. The bride and groom often didn't even SEE each other UNTIL their wedding day. And NOW, Tevye is looking at his daughters, who are getting married for LOVE, and they just seem SO happy. And HE remembers how his parents would TELL him that he and Golde would one day LEARN to love each other. So NOW, after 25 years of marriage, he wants to KNOW from her: *Golde, do you LOVE me?*

And don't we ALL ask that SAME question of our close and intimate LOVED ones and friends? And WHEN we ask that question -- sometimes verbally and sometimes not -- aren't we REALLY asking: *How important am I to YOU? How important am I in your life?* Friends, don't we ALL need to know that we are IMPORTANT to those we love, and that we are LOVED and loveable? And WHEN we hear it, or feel it, doesn't it bring us JOY and GRATITUDE? Of COURSE, it does!

And even JESUS needed to KNOW that He was LOVED. In fact, in our Scripture Lesson today, He asks Peter 3 TIMES: *Simon, son of John, do you LOVE me?* Now remember, just a few DAYS earlier, Peter had VOWED to be LOYAL to Jesus no matter WHAT. Even if he had to DIE for Jesus, he would DO it. But THEN, just a FEW hours LATER, as Jesus is ARRESTED in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter DESERTS Jesus and RUNS off like a scared puppy. And THEN, outside the home of Caiaphas, the High Priest, as Jesus is being TRIED before the Sanhedrin Council, Peter denies 3 times that he even KNOWS Jesus. So NOW, the Risen Christ ASKS Peter 3 times: *Peter, do you LOVE me? Do you REALLY love me? Can I really COUNT on you THIS time, Peter?* And 3 times, Peter responds, *Yes, Lord, I DO love you. You KNOW that I love you.* Peter's declaration is CLEAR. In fact, he EVEN feels ANNOYED, and INSULTED, as Jesus keep REPEATING the question.

It's like Tevye and Golde. Tevye asks her, *DO you love me?* And her FIRST response is, *Do I WHAT?* And THEN, they go back and forth as he KEEPS asking: *Do you LOVE me? Do you LOVE me?* And FINALLY, Golde says: *Listen! For 25 years I've washed your clothes, cooked your meals, cleaned your house, given you children, milked the cow. For 25 years, I've LIVED with you, FOUGHT with you, STARVED with you. For 25 years, my BED was YOURS! If THAT'S not LOVE, what IS?*

And I LOVE that statement because it's such a BEAUTIFUL way of saying: *Hey, LOVE is a VERB! LOVE in an ACTION word!* How OFTEN have I had to say just THAT when COUNSELING with someone, especially a COUPLE, or a PARENT? I tell them: *Don't you DARE tell your spouse that you LOVE him or HER, unless you are willing to ACT like it, and SHOW that person that he or she is LOVED! Don't you DARE tell your children that you LOVE them when you're not willing to make the SACRIFICES that love and children require!* It's TRUE, isn't it? LOVE is a VERB! It's an ACTION word! And THAT'S what Jesus is saying to PETER in our Scripture Lesson. He's saying: *WORDS are CHEAP, Peter! I HEARD your WORDS before! NOW, I want to know if you REALLY love me! And IF you REALLY love me, then SHOW me that you LOVE me! Don't just give me WORDS! SHOW me by feeding my sheep, by feeding my lambs, by tending my sheep. CARE for my flock, Peter. Love ME by loving the ones whom I LOVE.* In other words, Jesus COMMISSIONS Peter here. It's like Jesus is handing Peter His SHEPHERD'S staff and saying: *Now YOU take care of them, Peter.* And in commissioning PETER, Jesus ALSO commissions US. You see: whenever we see Jesus talking to PETER in the gospels, we can be SURE that He's talking to US. That's one of the FIRST lessons that we LEARN when we learn the art of BIBLE study. When Jesus talks to PETER, Jesus is talking to US.

SO, if THAT'S the case, then Jesus is saying to US: *SHOW me that you LOVE me! DON'T just TELL me! SHOW me!* And therefore, WE need to constantly be ASKING ourselves: *HOW do WE show our love for the Risen Christ? HOW do WE feed His sheep and lambs, and TEND His flock? What does that MEAN for 21<sup>st</sup> Century American Christians? What does it MEAN for middle and upper middle class SUBURBANITES in Southington, Connecticut?* Friends: THAT'S the question that WE need to STRUGGLE with day in and day out: *WHAT does it MEAN to feed His sheep and lambs, and tend His sheep, right HERE, right NOW, TODAY?* What **IS discipleship** for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century American?

Well obviously, as His disciples TODAY, we need to make CERTAIN, as BEST we can, that WE are CONSTANTLY reaching OUT to people, both HERE and around the globe, to MEET their BASIC needs. We need to CONSTANTLY be feeding the hungry, giving DRINK to the thirsty, clothing the naked, healing the sick, visiting prisoners, welcoming strangers, and doing ALL the things that Jesus talks about in Matthew 25, when He says: *Whatever you DO to even the LEAST of my brothers and sisters, you do it to ME. And whatever you DON'T do to THEM, you DON'T do to ME.* Yes, WE need to be meeting people's BASIC needs! We must LITERALLY feed His sheep and lambs.

However, do you remember when Jesus was TEMPTED in the wilderness to turn STONES into BREAD? WHAT was His REPLY? He said: *One does not LIVE by bread ALONE, but by EVERY word that comes from the mouth of God.* Now, WHAT that tells ME is that we CANNOT just take LITERALLY His command to FEED His sheep and lambs. NO! If we REALLY want to FEED His sheep and lambs, THEN we need to be sharing ANOTHER kind of food, the food that satisfies the SOUL. We need to be TEACHING them the Word of God, both as it appears in the Holy Scriptures, AND as we discern God STILL speaking in our lives and world TODAY, because ONE thing is for SURE: God **IS** still SPEAKING today! And therefore, WE need to be TEACHING people HOW to read and interpret the scriptures, and what's IN them. And we need to be TEACHING people HOW to LISTEN for God's VOICE in their day-to-day living. And personally, I don't believe that there is ANY better way of DOING that than IN and THROUGH the CHURCH of Jesus Christ.

You know: to ME, the local church is the **HOPE of the world!** And quite frankly, **THAT'S** why I'm IN this business. Everything ELSE in this world seems to be going down the TUBES just as FAST as it can go. This world is in such TURMOIL, and on SUCH a path toward self-destruction, that it's downright SCARY to be ALIVE these days! SO, more than anything ELSE, God's children today, the SHEEP and LAMBS of our Good Shepherd, NEED to be FED with a food that TRULY satisfies, a food that FILLS up their SOULS, which is *every WORD that comes from the mouth of God.* And friends, it's OUR job to FEED them, and IN the process, to TEND them: to LOVE them, to CARE for them, to PROTECT them. THAT, more than anything ELSE, is the MISSION that Christ gave to US when He said to Peter: *If you LOVE me, Peter, FEED my sheep, FEED my lambs, and TEND my sheep.*

And you know: THAT'S what **THIS** church is all ABOUT! SO, if that's NOT what you're looking for, then this **ISN'T** the church for YOU. You BETTER go find ANOTHER one! **THIS** church is ABOUT loving GOD, and LOVING God's children, **ALL** of them -- and **FEEDING** them, BODY and SOUL. And God wants EACH and every ONE of us to have a PART in great MISSION. God wants EACH and every ONE of us to **INVEST** in that mission, giving GENEROUSLY of our TIME, our TALENTS, and our TREASURE. You know, friends, if you haven't FOUND some sort of **MINISTRY** in this church that YOU can be a PART of, so that YOU can **share** with others YOUR time and YOUR talents in and through the WORK of this church, then YOU need to be FINDING such a ministry as SOON as possible! Oh, I KNOW: we live in a CONSUMER-DRIVEN culture, and LOTS of people come to church asking: *Hey, WHAT'S in it for ME? I'm HERE for what it GIVES to ME every week.* Well friends, it's OK to START church that way, but we can't REMAIN that self-centered, because that's **NOT** what church is ABOUT. The CHURCH is about LOVING Christ, and SHOWING our love for Christ by LOVING those whom HE loves: HIS sheep and HIS lambs!

And THAT is what we ALL need to consider very PRAYERFULLY this WEEK as we fill out our PLEDGE cards for the coming year, because our PLEDGE is our INVESTMENT in Christ and HIS church, and its MISSION. THAT is how we SHOW our love for Christ! So PRAY about it: does YOUR pledge TRULY indicate, truly EXPRESS, the **DEPTH** of YOUR love for Christ, **AND**, the

DEPTH of YOUR dedication to the WORK of Christ in this community and world? And IF it **DOES**, then turn your card in JOYFULLY, and really feel GOOD about it! But if it DOESN'T express the DEPTH of YOUR love for CHRIST and His MISSION, then PRAY about it! Really STRUGGLE with it! And ONLY turn your card IN when it makes you feel GOOD to DO so, when you can REALLY get EXCITED about it, because it's your LOVE. THINK about that, my friends. PRAY about it. Amen.