

What Happened at the Beachfront Bbq

Scripture Reading — John 21:15-19

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.” — John 21:17

After Peter’s triple denial of Jesus (John 18:15-27), the risen Christ appears one morning and invites Peter and his companions to a fish barbecue. After breakfast, Jesus asks Simon Peter, “Do you love me more than these?” Whoever or whatever “these” are, Jesus’ meaning is clear: Does Simon, son of John, love Jesus, Son of God, above all?

The English language masks the distinction between Jesus’ questions and Peter’s responses. Jesus asks, “Do you love [*agape*] me?” referring to total, unconditional love. Peter replies, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love [*phileo*] you,” referring to “brotherly love.” He can’t say he loves Jesus as Jesus loves him, so Peter professes the best love he has. Again Jesus asks, and Peter answers. Peter is hurt when Jesus asks a third time, but perhaps he’s not listening. With divine humility Jesus has used Peter’s word (*phileo*) this time, as if to say, “OK, I accept the best you can give.” Then Jesus says, “Feed my sheep” (see John 10).

Jesus is reconciling. Peter is being restored. Jesus’ three-fold query mirrors Peter’s triple denial. Peter’s triple profession of love for Jesus shows that his restoration is complete. And Jesus repeats the first call he made to Peter and the others: “Follow me!” (see Mark 1:17).

Do we love Jesus above all? Then let’s feed his sheep with the news of his resurrection.

Prayer

Lord, we have denied you often. Please restore and guide us to love and serve you faithfully. Amen.

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