

Sermon: 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter

Text: John 21: 1-19

Theme: Do you love Jesus?

Goal: To reflect on our attitude toward Jesus: Do we truly love Him as he loves us?

Dear Friends in the resurrected Christ,

Introduction: This encounter with Jesus was an embarrassing situation for Peter. He had denied Jesus three times while Jesus was being judged in the home of the High Priest. When the rooster cried, and the eyes of Jesus reached Peter, Peter realized how coward he had been denying Jesus; and he went out and wept bitterly. – And then Jesus was put to death on the cross. No more chance to apologise; no more chance to reconcile; no more chance to say any word to Jesus. He was dead and buried. Peter was desperate and frustrated with himself. Everything he had promised to Jesus had now felt down to the ground: He had promised to follow Jesus even to the cross; he had promised to defend Jesus against His enemies; he had promised to never deny Jesus... Days of darkness and question marks surrounded Peter...

But then happened what no one was expecting: The crucified Jesus came out of the tomb and appeared to the women and to the disciples! And the episode of our text reports the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples. It was a good chance to Peter to be face to face with His Master and to reaffirm Him about his intentions... maybe to apologise... But God doesn't want only good intentions or a simple "sorry". God wants more from us: He wants our love; He wants our whole life! And before Peter took an initiative

to speak, Jesus addresses a question to Peter, - a question that is waiting for our answer as well: “Do you truly love me?”

## I – The background

The angels at the empty tomb had told the women that the disciples should go to Galilee to meet the resurrected Jesus there. And they went back to the North, to their home city. While they were waiting for the opportunity when Jesus would reveal Himself to them, Peter said to the other disciples: “I’m going out to fish.” And seven of them agreed to go with him. – Remember that most of them were fishermen. It was not just a hobby or a pleasure; but their income to sustain their families came from this activity. As experienced fishermen, they went out at night; but they didn’t catch any fish.

When they were coming back early in the morning, approaching about 90 meter the shore, they saw someone standing there, asking for some fish. As there was no catch, they didn’t have any fish, the man said to them: “Through your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” And they caught 153 large fish! The apostle John immediately realized that this man was Jesus; and told it to Peter. Impetuous as always, Peter jumped into the water and swam to Jesus. After this he helped the disciples to bring the nets with the fish to the shore. A fire was ready and they put some of the fresh fish on the burning coals and had breakfast with Jesus.

Interesting to note that three appearances of Jesus to His disciples were around some food: On Easter Sunday afternoon He appeared to the disciples on the way to Emmaus and revealed Himself when he broke the bread at the table (Luke 24:30); on Easter Sunday evening He appeared to the disciples in Jerusalem while they were eating (Mark 16:14), and He ate something with them to prove that He was not a ghost (Luke 24:41, 42); and now at the shore of Galilee Sea. It seems that

Jesus likes to eat with us. Therefore we always invite Him when we sit at the table and pray: *Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest, and let these gifts to us be blessed. Amen.*

## II – The triple question

“When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these?” – Simon had always answered on behalf of the other disciples, and several times he had reaffirmed his fidelity to Jesus. After his bad experience when he denied Jesus, Jesus wanted to know if his love is really sincere and if he truly loved Jesus more than the other disciples. Peter replied immediately: “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” – Jesus asked the same question for the second time; and received the same answer. – But when Jesus asked the question for the third time, Peter was hurt. He had denied Jesus for three times, and now Jesus asked him “Do you love me?” three times. It was a call to true repentance, and a reminder that Peter should not boast about himself, but he should *fear, love and trust in Jesus above all things.*

It was also a second chance that Jesus was giving to Peter. He had been called three years before to follow Jesus when he was fishing in the same lake. He left everything and followed Jesus, being one of the leaders of the Twelve. Now Jesus called him again to follow Him. Jesus was not looking for saints to follow Him and to be Ambassadors of His Kingdom. Jesus knew very well the human nature and how weak we are. But He called and is still calling sinners to follow Him, restoring them and equipping them to serve Him. One of the commentaries I read said: *“To be a citizen of the resurrection kingdom is to be in a kingdom of second chances, a kingdom in which the lost are found, the losers are picked up from the wrestling mat of life and given a spot on the track team. Redirected, re-equipped, God*

*uses some pretty strange people in his kingdom. For all of us, that should be a message of hope. There is room in that mighty host, that great crowd, for the likes of you and me. His kingdom truly is more a hospital for sinners than a hotel for the saints.* (Phil Brand, p.2).

### III – The tasks

It is interesting to note the task Jesus gave to Peter after each answer: “Feed my lambs... Take care of my sheep... Feed my sheep...” The lambs and sheep, the flock, belong to Jesus, not to Peter. Peter, as a shepherd under the Chief Shepherd received the task to feed and to take care of Jesus’ flock. Many years later Peter wrote to his fellows in his 1<sup>st</sup> letter: “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away” (1 Peter 5:2-4).

Conclusions: When I had the opportunity to visit the church built on the shore of Galilee Sea, where this episode happened, a Roman Catholic Priest was leading a mass to an Italian tourist group. He had a list of the people attending the service; and he called one by one by name; the person came in front of the altar where there is an original stone called “The Lord’s Table”, because it is supposed that on that stone happened the breakfast with Jesus and the seven disciples, and he asked the person: *Maria, do you truly love Jesus more than these others?* And every one answered: *Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.* – I liked it. It’s time to question ourselves, each of us: Pastor Walter, Heindry, Carol... do you truly love Jesus more than everything? Our answer cannot be other than: *Yes, Lord, you know that I love you! Amen.*

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 10 April 2016