

DO YOU LOVE ME?
THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER
MAY 5, 2019

BECKY ROBBINS-PENNIMAN
CHURCH OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD, DUNEDIN, FL

The core of Christianity is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

The church year has two basic parts: the Christmas cycle, when we hear the prophecies about the coming Messiah, the birth of that Messiah, the Christ, and the revelation that he is the savior not just of the people of Israel, but of all tongues and nations, all times and places.

The shocking inclusiveness of this Messiah was in stark contrast to humanity's protective polarization that justified killing anyone not in our camp.

It is humanity's addiction to violence that sets us up for the Easter cycle, when we hear the prophecies about the death of God's Messiah, and celebrate the resurrection of Christ.

Are Jesus' incarnation and resurrection only about Jesus?

What difference do they make to those of us still on this side of the grave?

That's precisely the conundrum facing the friends of Jesus at the first Easter.

It was swell that the Father loved Jesus enough to raise him from the dead

But, what does that have to do with them *now*?

Were they just supposed to wait to die and go be with the Lord again? How long would *that* take?

In our gospel story today, we are with seven of the male disciples.

So far, they have seen the risen Jesus twice, not recognizing him either time

The last time, Jesus had said he was sending them out, full of his Spirit.

But, like so many of us, they had no idea what to do with all that.

They are joyful, but so confused about what it all means.

So those seven men left Jerusalem and walked the nearly 100 miles from Jerusalem to the Sea of Tiberias – the Sea of Galilee – same place, which is where they were from, and they went back to their old jobs: fishing in the Sea of Galilee, back to their everyday pre-Easter lives.

Jesus comes to those joyful but confused fishermen in their everyday lives

and does again what Jesus did before he was killed: he feeds people by the side of a lake;

not 5,000 this time, only seven. Some dinner parties are bigger than others.

Jesus brings his Resurrection life through to the other side of the terror of death

and continues God's miracle of feeding and caring for those he loves.

Then Jesus asks Peter if he loves him. Peter says of course he does.

Jesus asks again, and Peter says yes again.

When the third time came, and Peter's catches on that Jesus was confronting Peter's three denials, the three times he denied even knowing Jesus, let alone being his follower.

That reminder of his cowardice stabs Peter in the heart.

Jesus knows everything about him, good and terrible, and yet is giving him another chance.

Peter walks through the pain and says yes to love the third time.

But loving isn't just something you feel, it's something you do.

Jesus unleashes the power of the resurrection to transform Peter's life:

Each time Peter tells Jesus he loves him,

Jesus tells him to put that love into action by doing what Jesus did, to keep following him, a living Lord.

Today's Collect and Scripture readings are at the end of the sermon text.

Copyright notices: The Scripture text (except for the Psalm) is from the Common English Bible, CEB, Copyright 2010, 2011 by Common English Bible. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Unless otherwise noted, all other content is original and copyrighted by Becky Robbins-Penniman, 2019. All rights reserved.

The power of the resurrection is to free us to live a life of love in the midst of a world that wields death,
 a life of purpose and meaning and love and hope and strength and trust
 in the midst of pain and betrayal and violence and chaos and emptiness.
 I surely don't need to tell you we live in the midst of a world the wields death.

As I said, killing those who are not in our camp is what we humans have been doing for 10,000 years.
 We are dedicated to feeding OUR lambs, caring for OUR sheep,
 but the devil can take the other ones.

But, which lambs are Jesus' lambs? What sheep belong to him?

Jesus shocking inclusiveness 2,000 years ago is STILL in sharp contrast
 to our protective polarization.

Look again at that amazing vision of heaven in the Revelation to John:

*Then I looked, and I heard the sound of many angels surrounding the throne,
 the living creatures, and the elders.*

They numbered in the millions—thousands upon thousands. . . .

And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth

and under the earth and in the sea—I heard everything everywhere say,

*“Blessing, honor, glory, and power belong to the one seated on the throne
 and to the Lamb forever and always.”*

EVERY CREATURE IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH

AND UNDER THE EARTH AND IN THE SEA.

WHO is left out if this heavenly gathering? Indeed, WHAT is left out?

Jesus won't let the devil take ANY of his lambs and sheep;

so, he doesn't call his followers to hole up in a fortress to protect themselves.

He tells Peter and us to follow him right out in to the midst of a world that wields death
 with love, not optimism - optimism is when you're sure things in life will go right.

Jesus knew, Peter knew, I know, you know: that's just not the way it is.

Indeed, Peter followed Jesus straight into martyrdom, as the usual forces of polarization
 did their very best to stop Peter from caring for Jesus' lambs.

We, too, are sent people, people who to go and take care of all sheep and lambs
 wherever they are in this broken and beautiful world.

What does this look like?

Last October, 11 people were gunned down in a synagogue.

We quickly organized an interfaith candlelight vigil for 200 in Pioneer Park.

In March, 100 people were killed or injured in two mosques in New Zealand.

I soon went to the mosque here in Dunedin, Masjid Al-Salaam, to support them;
 and the mosque hosted a fabulous community dinner attended by 400 people.

This Easter, hundreds of Christians and foreigners were assaulted in Sri Lanka.

I was contacted immediately by my friends at the mosque,

who asked if they could come here today to show their love and respect.

Just over a week ago, another shooting in a synagogue, this one in San Diego.

Yesterday, I went with my friends from the mosque, the Baha'i community,

and another church to be with our Jewish friends at Congregation Beth Shalom

as a sign of deep respect and complete solidarity. These are fine, fine things, but wait a minute.

In terms of the Gospel, of what we say is our desire to follow Jesus:

we can't feed dead sheep. We can't take care of murdered lambs.

If love isn't just something you feel, but something you do,

shouldn't we be doing something BEFORE the killings?

That was exactly the message my sister, Hend Elhady, gave to us yesterday.

The Rabbis at the synagogue invited this precious Muslim woman to speak.

Hend's message was that mourning together is beautiful and comforting,
 but stopping the violence before it starts is the only way to honor and respect the life
 that God gives to all creatures. She said we need to act first and save, and not just react and weep.
 How do we start to care for the living sheep and lambs?
 On Easter Sunday, I asked you to look for the Reign of God in the mirror.
 The first step toward Jesus' inclusiveness is for each of us to look in our hearts
 and be honest about which of God's lambs we have put in another camp
 An old song says, we are carefully taught to hate.
 The Gospel demands that we learn to love, to love each other as Christ loves us.
 Then we pray for Jesus to unleash the power of the resurrection
 to transform our lives and the lives of *every creature in heaven and on earth*
and under the earth and in the sea
 until each one is as precious to us as they are to their Father in heaven.
 Then what? Well, it gets back not giving in to death, but to be determined to wage peace.
 Let's challenge ourselves to listen with respect, to give people a break,
 and even if someone is being hateful, don't return like for like.
 You can challenge the hate, or at least disengage from the interaction.
 You don't have to like someone to be kind to them.
 We must stop entertaining ourselves with gratuitous violence,
 and parents – too many video games deal in death.
 One gamer said he'd killed about 150,000 people by the time he was 18.¹
 That's a lot of dead lambs, even if they are digital. What is he learning?
 What if, in the power of the Resurrection, you're ready to take some risks?
 Believe it or not, you're taking one right now just by gathering in one place to worship.
 Most Christian churches in Sri Lanka are locked and empty today.
 Our Quaker friends have workshops called "Bystander Training," which teaches people how intervene
 when someone is harassing another person in public
 through tactics that de-escalate the conflict non-violently.
 Like Hend, they say we are to act first and save, and not just react and weep.
 Another idea: just after 9/11, a half-dozen of the stay-at-home moms of my church
 went to the mosque closest to us and said: "We will go with your women as they do their shopping.
 Here are our phone numbers; we will fit our schedules to theirs."
 This was totally the moms' doing, we clergy types didn't think of it at all.
 But I sure learned from them.

These are some ideas – and there are undoubtedly more and better ways
 for us to feed sheep and take care of lambs.

In the power of the Resurrection, we can break out of our protective camps
 and join with millions of others, thousands upon thousands of people of every tongue and nation
 and learn together how to arise from a world that wields death and wage God's peace.

COLLECT OF THE DAY

Eternal and all-merciful God, with all the angels and all the saints we laud your majesty and might. By the resurrection of your Son, show yourself to us and inspire us to follow Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

¹ <https://www.politifact.com/punditfact/statements/2014/jul/21/mark-omara/cnn-legal-analyst-18-kids-have-killed-over-100000-/>

EZEKIEL 34:11–16

The Lord God proclaims: I myself will search for my flock and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out the flock when some in the flock have been scattered, so will I seek out my flock. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered during the time of clouds and thick darkness. I will gather and lead them out from the countries and peoples, and I will bring them to their own fertile land. I will feed them on Israel's highlands, along the riverbeds, and in all the inhabited places. I will feed them in good pasture, and their sheepfold will be there, on Israel's lofty highlands. On Israel's highlands, they will lie down in a secure fold and feed on green pastures. I myself will feed my flock and make them lie down. This is what the Lord God says. I will seek out the lost, bring back the strays, bind up the wounded, and strengthen the weak. But the fat and the strong I will destroy, because I will tend my sheep with justice.

PSALM 30

I will exalt you, O Lord, because you have lifted me up and have not let my enemies triumph over me.

O Lord my God, I cried out to you, and you restored me to health.

You brought me up, O Lord, from the dead; you restored my life as I was going down to the grave.

Sing to the Lord, you servants of his; give thanks for the remembrance of his holiness.

For his wrath endures but the twinkling of an eye, his favor for a lifetime.

Weeping may spend the night, but joy comes in the morning.

While I felt secure, I said, I shall never be disturbed.

You, Lord, with your favor, made me as strong as the mountains."

Then you hid your face, and I was filled with fear.

I cried to you, O Lord; I pleaded with the Lord, saying,

"What profit is there in my blood, if I go down to the Pit?

will the dust praise you or declare your faithfulness?

Hear, O Lord, and have mercy upon me; O Lord, be my helper."

You have turned my wailing into dancing; you have put off my sack-cloth and clothed me with joy.

Therefore my heart sings to you without ceasing; O Lord my God, I will give you thanks for ever.

REVELATION 5:11–14

Then I looked, and I heard the sound of many angels surrounding the throne, the living creatures, and the elders. They numbered in the millions—thousands upon thousands. They said in a loud voice,

"Worthy is the slaughtered Lamb to receive power, wealth, wisdom, and might, and honor, glory, and blessing." And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea—I heard everything everywhere say,

"Blessing, honor, glory, and power belong to the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb forever and always." Then the four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshipped.

JOHN 21:1–19

Later, Jesus himself appeared again to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. This is how it happened: Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, Zebedee's sons, and two other disciples were together. Simon Peter told them, "I'm going fishing."

They said, "We'll go with you." They set out in a boat, but throughout the night they caught nothing. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples didn't realize it was Jesus.

Jesus called to them, "Children, have you caught anything to eat?"

They answered him, "No."

He said, "Cast your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some."

So they did, and there were so many fish that they couldn't haul in the net. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It's the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard it was the Lord, he wrapped his coat around himself (for he was naked) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they weren't far from shore, only about one hundred yards.

When they landed, they saw a fire there, with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you've just caught." Simon Peter got up and pulled the net to shore. It was full of large fish, one hundred fifty-three of them. Yet the net hadn't torn, even with so many fish. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples could bring themselves to ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came,

took the bread, and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When they finished eating, Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"

Simon replied, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you."

Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." Jesus asked a second time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Simon replied, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you."

Jesus said to him, "Take care of my sheep." He asked a third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was sad that Jesus asked him a third time, "Do you love me?" He replied, "Lord, you know everything; you know I love you."

Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. I assure you that when you were younger you tied your own belt and walked around wherever you wanted. When you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and another will tie your belt and lead you where you don't want to go." He said this to show the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. After saying this, Jesus said to Peter, "Follow me."

SERMON HYMN: *The Church of Christ in Every Age*

BLESSING: The God who is creating a new heaven and a new earth, who walks where least expected, who disturbs the comfortable and comforts the distressed, and whom death could not control, now sends you out to announce with your lives that the Lord is risen indeed. Go, you are blessed in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.