

First Lesson: Proverbs 3: 5-6

Gospel Lesson: John 21: 1-21

Sermon Series: Questions that Move Mountains: Do you Love Me?

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- We are in week 2 of an 8-week sermon series called “Questions that Move Mountains?” This will be a sermon series that will prepare and usher us into the upcoming Advent Season that will begin the First Sunday of December; that will invite us to unpack the questions that Jesus either asked or inspired; with the hope that our repeating First Lesson of Focus ; Proverbs 3: 5-6 that says to *Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight.* In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths; will take root into our hearts.
- The question that I am inviting us all to unpack is the question that Jesus asked in our gospel this morning is, **“Do you love me?”**

- Beginning with the Scriptural and traditional part of this passage, so that we can gain a better understanding of what is going on in the historical context of this story;
- What we are witnessing in this story today is Jesus appearing to the disciples for the third time after the Resurrection (v. 14)
- The first occasion can be found in John 20:19–23 when the disciples were together with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders and Jesus suddenly appears before them with the invitation to “Receive the Holy Spirit.”
- The second occasion can be found in John 20:26–29 where the disciples were in the house and again and this time Thomas was with him and his doubts of Jesus Resurrection was confirmed when Jesus told him to “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

- In this third occasion we are reading today, it is suggested that the fishing trip represented “complete apostasy” on the part of the disciples as a fulfillment of the forecast of Jesus that they would leave Him and be scattered (John 16:32).
- For those of us who may be interested in knowing what the biblical definition of apostasy is— a quick Google search would define it as being the rejection of Christ by one who has been a Christian.
- **Apostasy in this context** is a theological category describing those who have voluntarily and consciously abandoned their faith in the God of the covenant, who manifests Godself most completely in Jesus Christ.
- Taking all of this in, it is difficult to think that the disciples would apostatize after having received the benediction of Jesus with its possible effect on their lives (John 20:22).

- Some scholars have identified in this that they had scattered at the time of the Crucifixion, but had been brought together again.
- It is more conceivable however to see this fishing trip as a holiday diversion on the part of the disciples, rather than a return to their former vocation.
- Only **Simon Peter** and **the sons of Zebedee** are known to have been fishermen.
- They were waiting for the day of Pentecost (Luke 24:49) when the work of the Church would begin under the power of the Holy Spirit; and they were waiting also for others to assemble.
- Many others were also witnessing appearances of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:3–8); thus the one hundred twenty were being readied for that great day.
- The appearance of Jesus in our gospel takes place in Galilee at the Sea of Tiberius.

- Matthew also records a Jerusalem resurrection appearance in (Matt. 28: 9-10), followed by a Galilean appearance in (Matt. 28- 16-19)
- Mark records a Galilean appearance in Mark 16:7.
- The Sea of Tiberius which is interchangeably also called the Sea of Galilee was near the site of the miraculous feeding that occurred at John 6: 1-14.
- The purpose of my naming all of these connections although there are other connections that I could draw from this one sea...that could extend this sermon by an extra 15 minutes—but I won't.
- This is a long way of my naming that this lets us know that there was a lot of possibility for not just miracles, but spiritual growth, learning, reaffirmation of faith and more that occurred at this sea.
- Furthermore why I am drawn to this sea is because in researching the nature and properties of seas and oceans, I learned that they are vast and an

overall mysterious place that covers 70 percent of the Earth's surface.

- For while it is a beautiful and awe-inspiring sight, it can also be incredibly dangerous.
- There are many parts of the sea that are considered to be the most dangerous due to its unique characteristics; not to mention the hazards they can pose to both sailors and swimmers alike.
- One of the most dangerous parts of the ocean is the open sea, [where large waves and strong currents can make navigation difficult.](#)
- Another hazardous area is the deep ocean, where the pressure is so high that it can crush submarines and other deep-sea vehicles.
- Therefore, placing the understanding of the nature of seas may give another inspiring energy from us all to draw from in the happenings of this story today;

- For when Jesus appeared to the disciples Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples and asked Simon Peter in particular “Do you Love Me?”—three times to be exact;
- These were the potential conditions that the disciples were in when Jesus asked this question.
- For in this story we are to understand that the disciples were out fishing in these mysterious and potential risky conditions.
- Not to mention the Word tells us that *They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing, (V3)* yet Jesus still had the boldness to ask this question of them...**do you love me?**
- **Do you love me**...even in these less than ideal circumstances?
- **Do you love me**...even though you haven't caught any fish?

- I tell you as a leader of this day, I am challenged by Jesus faith to even be able to dare ask this question of his disciples...**do you love me?**
- I believe why I am challenged if I am honest, is because there is a risk in Jesus' question in approaching his disciples, especially in the conditions they were in, because **there was a huge risk in the asking of this question that they would say no...**
- **They could say no Jesus I don't love you...** because I haven't caught any fish.
- **No Jesus, I don't love you** because this sea is too vast
- **No Jesus, I don't love you** because this sea is too mysterious...
- **No Jesus, I don't love you** because this sea is overall just too difficult to tend to, to manage, to predict, to be in control of.....

- Furthermore, I know what is driving me personally, for in my vulnerability in sharing, my hope is that we will all unpack this question as it pertains to the prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness that we have pledged to commit to this ministry of Lincoln First United Methodist of Church— is because as I recall the picture of the brain,
- Where last week I talked about the reptilian portion of the brain that is our survival mode,
- The limbic system of our brain that harnesses our emotions;
- And the Neo-Cortex portion of our brain in which our speech, logic, and higher thinking skills resides;
- My aha moment that keeps me from being able to ask that question of “do you love me?” Is because most of my life, I have operated mostly in the limbic portion of brain—through emotions.

- And just as last week I named that all three portions of our brain are there for a reason;
- My biggest revelation is that there is a reason why the neocortex which is colored in blue/purple is the larger section of the brain that we all should strive to operate out of.
- This is because when we are in the Neo-cortex, this is where creativity, clarity, vision, organization, critical thinking skills and more thrive!
- However, in my case, whenever I am stressed, or whenever I am worried, or whenever I am in conflict, most often times, my emotions take over everything.
- **Which then causes me to** internalize everything—
- **Which then causes** the reptilian portion to get engaged as well—taking their turns in blocking out my joy, my spiritual well being, self-esteem, relationships and more—

- Not to mention most of my life, with the exception of having family members that love me;
- Most of my interactions as it pertains to leadership and relationships has resulted in people leaving the scene— almost immediately.
- My first experience of leadership that I feel comfortable enough to share with you is when I became the First African American student council president at Winfield High in Winfield, KS— my parents moved myself and brothers from Brooklyn, NY to Winfield.
- I ran for this office in my junior year.
- Anyone who knows Winfield, KS knows that it is a pretty small town of roughly 11,000 or so people..
- It is also very White, I in fact was one of 5 Black kids in this school at the time.
- However, I was the cool kid from NYC and I won the race.
- However it was clear that I wasn't supposed to win.

- Which became apparent when all of the parent sponsors quit that year because I would not step down.
- Leaving myself with the Vice-Principal who was very unkind towards me **because I wouldn't step down.**
- Leaving me then to have my family help me to pull together homecoming planning and other events.
- **Do you Love Me?**
- The second incident that also occurred in Winfield, KS is when I then planned to have a skating party for my sweet 16 in which the invitation was open to the entire school;
- No one showed up to that party except for my family again in which we all still skated—but it was still very hurtful.
- **Do you Love Me?**
- This is a long way of my naming that Jesus is demonstrating a powerful example of how one

overcomes this fear and vulnerability in the asking of this question...**do you love me?**

- For once again, the disciples very well could have said no.
- However, as the Wednesday night Applying the Sermon to Class also noted in my absence while I was away on business, Jesus not only asked this question **Do you Love me?—Jesus was brave enough to ask the question three times.**
- As I place this question in our present day climate as a Church community —**Jesus asked them three times**—even though Church attendance is declining—
- **Jesus asked them three times**—even in the midst of finances shrinking—
- **Jesus asked them three times**—in the midst of this vast sea that I will name to be the Church—in all of her mystery, beauty, raging waters and conflicting feelings—**Do you love Me?**

- And it suddenly occurred to me why Jesus was able to still ask this question when the answer could have been no....Do You Love Me...
- Is that Jesus teaches us how one arrives to their yes to this question—
- And it all goes back to the brain;
- For Jesus could have been like many of us—stuck in either the reptilian or the limbic system of our brain—
- For my scholarship and spiritual guidance teaches me that when you and I get stuck in these places of our fears and emotions, there is no room for us to truly love—
- For it is difficult to love ourselves—it is difficult to love our neighbors.
- And who is our neighbors Church family...every one!
- I'm talking about the people we like...
- The people we don't like—

- The people that condemns us—
- The people that commends us—
- As professed followers of Jesus Christ our love then extends to the Church as a whole—
- For that is who we have professed to be here at Lincoln First United Methodist Church;
- A Church that is community centered, focused and minded to share and extend God's love to everyone.
- Which means that through our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness, **we are called to love** the Church when attendance is up—
- **We are called to love the Church** when the attendance is down—
- **We are called to love the Church** when the sermons are good—
- **We are called to love the Church** when the sermons are not good—

- **We are called to love the Church** when some may choose to move on—
- **We are called to love the Church** when some choose to press on—
- And one of the ways we begin achieving this level of agape, unconditional love Jesus teaches us— it starts with our answer to this question...do you love me—
- For when we are brave enough to say yes, then this is when the transformation really begins—
- For it is through Jesus we learn how to maintain this amazing balance—
- Where our thinking neocortex is fully focused and strengthened in Jesus;
- Who teaches us that we all have the capability to weather our seas, regardless of how scary, vast, and mysterious they may be;
- That teaches us that how we begin balancing the limbic and reptilian intrusions that often like to

come out and play especially when the sea is disrupted—is by us choosing to say yes to God’s will and yes to God’s way.

- Which thereby allows us to become unstuck;
- Unstuck from our fears;
- Unstuck from our insecurities;
- Unstuck from our anxieties;
- Unstuck from what keeps us from embracing fully this love—
- This love that saves us;
- This love that stays us;
- This love that picks us up, turns us around and places our feet on solid ground....
- That allows us to *Trust in the Lord with all our hearts, and do not rely on our own insights. In all our ways acknowledge God, and God will make straight our paths"*
- Let the Church say Amen!

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