

Synod Eucharist, May 22, 2015

John 21:15-19

¹⁵When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs."¹⁶A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." ¹⁷He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." ¹⁸Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." ¹⁹(He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

It's early morning. Though the disciples have been with the risen Jesus for days, a group of them, led by Peter, have decided to go back to fishing, and so have been working all night from their boat. Now, without a single fish to show for their nighttime labour, they have brought their boat close to shore. It is there that through tired eyes they catch sight of a man on the shore who calls out to them. Cast your nets one more time on the right side of the boat the man urges them to do. A bit skeptical, they do as he says. And when they do, they pull in the enormous catch they had been trying to land all night on their own.

"It is the Lord!", John the beloved disciple declares to them all.

And before everyone knows it, they're all on the shore eating breakfast together from the fish they have caught, with Jesus, himself, as the cook. It's then that Jesus speaks directly to Peter in the words of our Gospel today.

“Do you love me?” “Do you love me?” “Do you love me?” Jesus asks Peter three times.

“Do you love me?” It’s a question posed to each us in many forms throughout our lives.

“Do you love me?” As early as grade school, the question comes to us from those who want to count us as their friends and from all the possible activities that want to claim our attention and our participation.

“Do you love me?” From these beginnings, the question of who and what we love becomes the engine of our lives as we navigate the wonders and perils of our youth, as we find our way through young adulthood and not so young adulthood and as, much to our surprise, we turn into elders who are still in the process of figuring out who and what we are drawn to, who and what we will embrace in our lives.

“Do you love me?” our spouses, partners, family member and friends ask us.

“Do you love me?” our jobs and vocations whisper to us.

“Do you love me?” our churches and civic groups seem to ask.

And just as when Jesus repeatedly asks Peter this very question, when we are asked this question by people, by our vocations, by our churches and by other groups, what’s being asked of us is not whether we have warm, fluttery feelings about these people or things. No, what’s being asked of us is whether we will give ourselves to someone or to something—whether we will give it all: heart, mind, and actions.

This and no less is what Jesus is asking Peter in our Gospel “Do you love me?” Jesus asks him. “Yes” Peter tells him. “Then feed my sheep” Jesus says.

And so here you and I are at our 2015 Synod being asked the same question, being asked whether we are willing to give ourselves to the people that Jesus calls his “sheep,” whether we are willing to feed them with the food we ourselves have already given to offer them. Will we give it all, not only to the people already within our parish’s orbit but also to the ones beyond our parishes, those who might be looking for who we are and for the food we have?

And just as Jesus asked his question of Peter three times, today and tomorrow morning you and I will be exploring three different ways we can feed the people God has given us to feed. first, feeding people by offering them community; second, feeding people by offering them an experience of God and, finally, feeding people by offering them a way of living the Christian life that is distinctively Anglican.

And so let me say something about each of these.

About offering people community in our parishes—will we, can we, wake up to the fact that we have the gift of community to offer those in this region who are socially isolated, far from home, or longing for a sense of connection? For we have experience gathering different kinds of people, different ages, different ethnicities, different countries of origin, different religious backgrounds, different family configurations, all under one roof. We have experience helping people cultivate friendships over time,

over meals and over conversation. We have experience being parishes that simply allow a person a place to belong even before they're sure what and how they believe.

About offering people an experience of God in our parishes—will we, can we, wake up to the fact that we must shape our parishes so that they both entice and satisfy the longing that people naturally have for God? For our God yearns to be a palpable presence at the center of the lives of each and every one of our parishes--God who is both beyond our understanding and standing right beside us, or standing on the beach before us in our own flesh. God who brings new life out of shattered expectations and then does it again and again. God whose language is prayer and whose idea of beauty is justice. God who chose us first, who loved us first, who poured out his life for us first.

And finally about offering people a distinctive and compelling Anglican identity in our parishes—will we, can we, wake up to the fact that particularity is always better than being generic, that heritage is a gift to be opened and shared in the present moment, that who we are in our identity can be trusted today more than ever before? For we have beauty and mystery to offer as food. We have open-mindedness and tolerance. We have liturgy and literature. We have the Bible and baptismal identity. We have reason and the rhythm of daily prayer. And these are only a small selection of who and what we are!

These three things—community, an experience of God, our distinctive and compelling Anglican heritage--these are the three ways we have been given to feed the people of God that we will be exploring over the next two days.

When I go on parish visitations here in the Diocese, I'm often asked what the difference is between parishes in Canada and the parishes I used to work with in the US. After some rather obvious comments—that parishes in Canada serve sweet pickles and parishes in the US don't, that parishes in Canada have a picture of the queen in their halls and parishes in the US have no pictures of rulers or political figures of any kind anywhere on their property, after all these comments, I get down to the truth: in my experience people in Canada love their parishes with a love I have never seen before. People in this Diocese love their parishes with a love I have never seen before.

“Do you love me?” Jesus asks Peter and us today. “Do you love me enough to go beyond fondness for me, to go beyond that warm and fluttery feeling you may have for me, to go beyond these things to the new work that it will take to feed the people that God has given us to feed here and now?”

The Lord of Love, the Lord of the abundant catch waits for our answer. The Lord of Love, the Lord of the abundant catch waits for your answer.