

Questions Jesus Asked sermon series

“Do You Love Me?”

[John 21:15-17](#)

For the past several Sundays the Church has been following Pastor Oak -Yean Kim Jeung in a series of sermon questions Jesus asked:

What are you looking for? (John 1:35-42)

What is your name?-(Luke 8; 26-30)

Do you see this woman? (Luke 7:36-50)

Do you want to get well? (John 5:1-9)

Where is your faith? (Luke 8:22-25)

Who do you say that I am? (Mark 8:27-29)

Why are you crying? (John 20-11-18)

Today we will look at “Do you love me... “?

Feed my lambs; tend my Sheep (take care of my sheep); feed my sheep (John 21:15-17).

Three times Jesus asked Peter the question: “Do you love me? And three times he told him what to do if he truly loves him. *Some commentators say that the three times were meant to remind Peter about the three times he denied having any dealings with Jesus: “I don’t know him”.* Others say it was meant to show the importance of what Jesus wanted Peter to be and to do. No matter what the intention were, this very event became a critical moment in the life of the church.

It was a charge to Peter. Remember... Jesus said to Peter, “You are Peter (Meaning Rock), and upon this rock I will build my church, and the powers of hell shall not conquer it (NLB, Matthew 16:18).

As we go about finding answers to why Jesus asked Peter three times “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me? I want to suggest that the work of the church is to awaken people to God's presence and activities in their lives and in all creation. God as I personally know is constantly inspiring us as a Church with the vision of what we can be in the light of our personal experience and communal context.

But first, let’s look at the text. What happened, where did it happen and why?

The setting is the shore of the Sea of Galilee when Jesus was having breakfast with his disciples soon after his resurrection and appearance. Like many spiritual leaders do Jesus used the meal table to encourage and exhort Peter about the responsibilities ahead of him and probably to tell him what will happen to him during the course of his work.

Jesus started with a question, "Peter son of Jonah, do you love me?" Peter answered affirmatively, “Yes Lord, you know that I love you...” Jesus followed with the same question again and again and gave in-

instructions as to what to do if Peter truly loves his Master. If Peter truly loves his master, he is to care and tend to the people who belong to Christ (Feed my Lambs, tend my Sheep, feed my sheep). Although addressed to Peter, the specific instruction and context was for those people in Jerusalem who will be responsible for spreading the gospel and good news of Jesus Christ after he ascends and disappears from them.

Whether the three fold-questions were meant to remind Peter of the three times he denied having anything to do with Jesus, the fact remains that Jesus impressed on Peter in that moment how important his new role of tending to the people of Christ's followers would be.

It is common sense that when you hear someone - especially your superior, senior or leader - repeatedly say something to you, you quickly understand that it is extremely important.

When I showed up at Campbell UMC in the days of Pastors Emeritus Dick and Bobby Corson, Pastor Dick repeatedly instructed and encouraged me to go to the Pacific School of Religion to study for a Master's in Divinity degree, which is a requirement for an active connectional and elder ministry in the California-Nevada Conference. He did everything to get me into that institution. But then, and then and then, he disappeared from me six months later (retired, by the way). I said what? This is not going to work. However, I kept to the plan. Laying one of the foundations for what became a vital and vibrant African ministry at Campbell UMC.

Like many spiritual leaders before him, Jesus wanted to make sure Peter understood this vital charge. Jesus was trying to make sure that Peter really understands what his responsibilities would be and how important it is for him to stick to the plans. Jesus was tasking Peter with leading God's people and God's Church. Jesus was making clear that Peter would be the one to follow His footsteps and glorify God.

Do you love me...Feed my lambs...tend my sheep and feed my sheep.

It is interesting that two Greek words are used in this text. One is **Agape: ἀγάπη, agape**, and the other is **PHILEO: φιλία philía**.

Jesus used **AGAPE** in the first two questions "do you love me...?" while Peter answered in the affirmative by using **PHILEO**, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus then used **PHILEO** the third time and Peter again answered like someone getting angry because of the repeated questions, "Lord, you know everything: you know that I love you..." again using **PHILEO**.

AGAPE is unconditional Love; it is the intense, devotion and complete or sacrificial love.

PHILEO: on the other hand is a type of a brotherly, sisterly love or friendly love. It could refer to a kind of intimate relationship with someone

In this text, Jesus was stretching Peter to move from the position of Phileo which is a kind of brotherly or friendly love to AGAPE which is unconditional love: The intense, complete, devotion and sacrificial love. "Peter, do you love me unconditionally?" Take care of my people.

This same question applies to the Church today. "Do we love Jesus"?

The mandate to build the Church was given by Jesus to Peter and the other disciples. Centuries and generations have passed from Peter and the disciples of Jesus and to us today.

This responsibility has been handed down from centuries, from generations to generation. But the same question remains to be answered by every generation “DO WE LOVE JESUS? Does the Church today love Jesus? Do you love Jesus? Do I?”

If the church loves Jesus then the church is to awaken people to God’s presence and activities in their lives and in all creation. One of the primary roles of the church is to proclaim alternative visions and introduce novel possibilities that transform the world. The Church is indeed the body of Christ. And if the church loves Jesus, it is to embrace novelty, whether spiritual, scientific or cultural in the light of the creative wisdom of tradition and the ongoing life changing presence of Jesus Christ.

Faithfulness to God requires the church to affirm and critically embrace the dynamic interdependence of life in all its different forms. The church as a reflection of God’s universal aim at creative transformation celebrates and shares God’s vision of healing and shalom. From the sermon on the mountain, to this charge to love: feed and tend to God’s children, the church is intended to be a light in the world revealing God’s presence and inviting people to share in God’s personal and planetary mission.

The Bible is the primary source of our faith and the Church. No dispute. However, if we read the Bible as it is written without the context of the reader or readers we tend to be literalists.

Bruce Epperly is a professor of process theology at the Claremont School of Theology, one of the notable United Methodist Theological Schools that educates spiritual and other world leaders.

In his book, *Process Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed*, he contends that

The Bibles still can transform our lives when it is viewed an adventure book, The Bible transforms people’s lives today when it is seen as an invitation for contemporary people to become part of God’s ongoing holy adventure moving through their lives and communities. In a time of constant change and uncertainties, the scripture narrative of liberation, journey, healing, and justice- seeking call us to an innovative and imaginative faith¹

As I reflect on this narrative, I see that the church cannot escape responsibility for our fellow Christians and the broader human community or the planet for that matter. If we want to love Jesus we have to look at the broader picture of God’s mission. Our faithfulness to God aims at embracing beauty and enhancing wholeness. The church is called to add beauty to the world by its message and mission. If the church is to succeed in its mission of reaching out to all irrespective of who people are or where they come from, if the church is to be grounded in the affirmation of God as the intimate and ongoing source of loving relatedness, passages and rules that encourage genocide, racism, slavery, sexism, heterosexism, and anti- Judaism must be challenged.

It is my fervent belief that the world can be changed, people can gain equality and injustice can be overturned and our environment too can be healed. Loving Jesus, and looking forward to the future does not guarantee that justice will roll down like waters or the church will survive. The uncertainties shadow the horizon. But despite these uncertainties, God is constantly inspiring and challenging us with new possibil-

¹ Bruce Epperly, *Process Theology: A Guide for the perplexed* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011) 126.

ities and ways of partnering in healing wounds of hate, sexism, religious extremism, racism and transforming lives. God's vision of beauty, truth and goodness is always around us.

Mother Theresa in blessed memory shows us how this works. Born in Macedonia to parents of Albania descent and known in the Roman Catholic Church as Saint Teresa, devoted her life to caring for the sick and poor. She built hospitals and orphanages for the poor in Africa, and many other third world countries. In one of her documentaries I listened to long time ago, she stated, "By Faith, I am a Catholic nun. As to my calling, I belong to the world. As to my heart, I belong entirely to the Heart of Jesus..."

Campbell United Methodist Church is no stranger to such services and loving Jesus on campus and beyond:

- The Youth and Young adults for the Sierra Service project,
- The In Vision ministry, now Lives Moves
- The Jail ministry,
- Rose Mary School Project,
- AMDCF, and Shoe and clothes Projects to Sierra Leone.

These are all service to vulnerable groups. People create beauty and love in these services they provide at Campbell UMC.

We do not have to travel far way to holy lands or confine our self to holy sites. God is here, in this place and with us now, sharing with us His unconditional presence and love.

BUT DO YOU LOVE HIM?