

John 21:15-19

"It's In our Nature"

This morning's passage with Jesus and Peter on the beach is one of those head scratchers. (pause) You know how there are some passages of Scripture that just leave us scratching our heads and wondering, *what?!* What was that really all about? Why did Jesus have to ask Peter three times if Peter loves Jesus? What was it about Peter, and what is it about all of us which requires the question to be asked more than once? Do you love Jesus?

The Great Commandment says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Deut 6:5; Matt 22:37). The second greatest commandment says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18; Matt 22:39). These are the greatest commandments from the Old Testament. They supersede all of the others. By fulfilling these commandments we will fulfill all of the others. And yet there is Peter, having breakfast with Jesus on the beach after the resurrection. Peter had denied Jesus three times in the courtyard of the home of the high priest. Now Jesus is giving Peter a chance to redeem himself, but why does Jesus have to ask Peter three times, "Do you love me" (John 21:15-17). (pause) I wonder if it has something to do with the nature of who we are as human beings.

When God created humanity on the sixth day of creation God created us male and female in God's image. God gave humanity dominion over all of the earth and the command to subdue the earth (Gen 1:26-31). However, in Genesis 2 God creates man and places man in the Garden of Eden with the task of tilling and keeping the garden of Eden (Gen 2:15). At the end of the sixth day God saw all that God had created and saw that it was good (Gen 1:31). If we examine the fall, the ground is cursed because of Adam's sin and Adam will have to work the ground in the sweat of his brow for the rest of his days (Gen 3:19). So I am gonna guess that before the fall Adam had free reign to see just how far he could push the earth to see how fruitful creation could be. I believe the nature of humanity before the Fall was good. We have always been boundary pushers. I need only look at my children for proof. It was humanity's curiosity which lead Adam and Eve to wonder just what comes next. How far might we go?

Then came the Fall. I wonder if Adam and Eve had been laying under the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and wondering out loud what knowledge did the fruit of this tree hold and why would they die if they ate it. I wonder if it was that curiosity which lead Adam and Eve to be open to the serpent's temptation. The Bible does not tell us how those events began. The Bible does tell us what happened afterward.

Adam and Eve were afraid, and hid. Think about that for a minute. What had Adam and Eve ever had a need to be afraid of before that moment? They lived in God's garden, under God's protection and according to God's provision. Everything in the garden submitted to them and did their will. God had given Adam and Eve dominion over the earth and now Adam and Eve were afraid. Through the tree of the knowledge of good and evil Adam and Eve learned what it was to be afraid. By a show of hands, how many people here know what it is to be afraid? Have any of y'all ever been afraid? I think one of the repercussions of the Fall is fear became a part of our human nature.

To live the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ it is important that we recognize and take ownership of the things which scare us most. If we do not claim and own our fears they will prevent us from doing what God has called us to do. Our fears can be a trap or a snare which keeps us away from God. In the Garden of Eden when God came to walk with Adam and Even in the cool of the day, Adam and Eve hid from God because they were

afraid. Fear is not God's way of pushing us away. Fear prevents us from coming closer to God. God is always reaching out past our fear. We have to find the courage to take God's hand and say yes. Peter is a wonderful example of this struggle.

It was Peter, and Peter alone who found the courage to step out onto the water to walk to Jesus in the midst of a storm (Matt 22:14-33). It was Peter who took his eyes off of Jesus and then sank into the water because Peter was afraid of the wind and the waves. Jesus did not cause Peter to sink beneath the waves. It was Peter's fear. Scripture says, "when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "lord, save me" (Matt 14:30). Then in the courtyard of the high priest on the night Jesus was arrested Peter was afraid again. Peter denied Jesus three times. **(long pause)**

There is a story about a time when John Wesley was afraid. Do y'all remember; do y'all know that John Wesley once came to the American colonies? **(pause)** It's true. John and his brother Charles sailed to the Americas on October 14, 1735. The crossing was met with storms and very rough seas. Most of the Englishmen and sailors including John and his brother Charles were terrified for their lives. Between rampant sea sickness, bailing water and huddling below decks most of the crew and passengers were bargaining with God to get them out of this because they didn't want to die. **(pause)** Most everyone except one group of people. There was a group of 26 Moravians on board the ship. In the midst of the terrible storms, the roaring wind, and the walls of water breaking over the ship the Moravians mildly and quietly continued singing praises to God. Afterward, John Wesley asked them, "Was you not afraid?" One of the Moravians answered, "I thank God, no." Wesley continued, "But were not your women and children afraid?" He replied mildly, "No: our women and children are not afraid to die."<sup>1</sup> John Wesley would later write in his journal, "I can conceive no difference comparable to that between a smooth and a rough sea except that which is between a mind calmed by the love of God and one torn up by the storms of earthly passions."<sup>2</sup> **Fear** can be one of those "**earthly passions.**"

My sisters and brothers in this excerpt from John Wesley's journal we see the turn. We can see how the love of God helps us to fight against the brokenness of our human nature. When Jesus appears to Peter and the remaining disciples on that beach Jesus asks Peter three times, "do you love me" (John 21:15-17). As important as it is for Peter to declare his love for Jesus it just might be more important that Peter's response is sincere and courageous. Love is a choice. Will we chose to stand up against our fear so we are able to accept Jesus Christ and the help Christ offers? The result of the Fall is our fears lead us to selfishness; self-reliance, self-centeredness, and self-preservation. Fear shifts the focus to us, and what we want. Through the love of God there is the courage to choose to love God and to love others. It takes courage to put God first. It takes courage to stand up for the rights of others even when they don't look or behave in ways we find socially acceptable. It takes courage to be a child of God; to be a Christian in our hearts.

Brothers and sisters there are times when my fears and selfishness get the better of me. There are days when I am tired and don't feel like being nice, or helpful. When I give into that selfishness I always wind up feeling miserable on the other side. However, when I take care of myself; get the rest I need and eat right I am able to choose to serve God and others, and in the end I am the better for it. **(pause)** Are we not all better for Christ having made the decision to take time to be by Himself to pray? Are we not all the better for Christ being willing to choose to put God's will first? **(pause)** If this example is a benefit to all of us, then shouldn't Christ's example be the way we live our lives as well?

In the Name of Jesus Christ - Amen

---

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth J. Collins, *John Wesley: A Theological Journey*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press 2003) 58.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth J. Collins, *John Wesley: A Theological Journey*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press 2003) 58.